

INSERVICE AND PRESERVICE TEACHER KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTIONS  
OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND ITS IMPACT ON READING AND  
OVERALL ACADEMIC ATTAINMENT

A Dissertation

by

APRIL GAYLE DOUGLASS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2011

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

Inservice and Preservice Teacher Knowledge of Social Emotional Learning and Its  
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## ABSTRACT

Inservice and Preservice Teacher Knowledge and Perceptions of Social Emotional Learning and Its Impact on Reading and Overall Academic Attainment. (August 2011)

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This dissertation describes the results of two studies that examined preservice and inservice teachers' knowledge of social and emotional learning (SEL) and its impact on academic achievement. Components of SEL, such as self-efficacy and self-regulation, play an important role in academic attainment and can be especially beneficial to young readers. One hundred and seventy inservice and 155 preservice teachers completed surveys that measured their overall knowledge of SEL concepts and perceptions regarding their preparedness for teaching SEL, its importance, and implementation.

The descriptive results indicated both inservice and preservice teachers had some underlying knowledge regarding SEL, but performed poorly in identifying definitions of fundamental SEL terms. The large majority of preservice and inservice teachers felt SEL was important to academic achievement, but seemed conflicted about the role of SEL in classroom instruction. Responses from inservice and preservice teachers indicate they may feel underprepared for teaching SEL in their classrooms. Multiple regression

analyses revealed preservice teachers' responses to items on the perceptions scales predicted overall knowledge scores. Analysis of Variance results indicated there were no differences by demographic variables on overall teacher knowledge scores and responses to perceptions scales.

The results are consistent with previous findings on teachers' perceptions of SEL's importance. Implications for teacher preparation programs and classroom instruction are discussed along with directions for future research.

## DEDICATION

To my son, Owen

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Conventional beliefs, emphasizing mathematics and literacy components, have disregarded an essential aspect of school success. Emerging research has brought attention to the importance of certain components of social and emotional learning (SEL) in classrooms and their possible positive impacts on academic achievement (Duncan, Dowsett, Claesssens, Manguson, Huston, et al., 2007; Liew, McTigue, Barrois, & Hughes, 2008; McClelland, Cameron, McDonald-Connor, Farris, Jewkes, et al., 2007). Although it cannot be argued that literacy and mathematical skills are essential components of the educational process, it is important to realize that social and emotional aspects of development are likely inseparable from the acquisition of these skills. Current focus on high stakes, standardized achievement tests have made it difficult for teachers to focus on the socio-emotional aspects of instruction. In actuality, development of certain SEL skills as integrated components of educational objectives may help enhance students' academic achievement through improvement of their ability to communicate effectively and regulation of their own learning (Blair & Razza, 2007; Denham & Weissberg, 2004).

If the development of SEL skills is beneficial to academic attainment, how can it be of value specifically to the field of reading? Social and emotional learning skills emphasize students' ability to self-regulate both inter and intrapersonal skills such as

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This dissertation follows the style of *Reading & Writing Quarterly*.

fostering relationships with others and monitoring one's own attitudes and actions.

When learning to read, students face many challenges simultaneously including decoding unfamiliar words or sounds, managing the rate at which they read, and monitoring their comprehension of the text. Social and emotional learning skills can give early readers the tools they need to foster collaborative relationships with their peers and teachers, monitor their work habits, and persevere when reading becomes difficult.

As the research in SEL points more clearly toward its benefits in academic attainment, it becomes increasingly clear that teachers need to be familiar with SEL concepts and how to implement them in classroom instruction. By doing so, teachers create an atmosphere more conducive to learning by taking into account the cognitive, social, and emotional processes of learning. Teacher education on SEL should begin in preservice coursework and be continuously developed through inservice education.

The present studies examine knowledge and perceptions of SEL from the perspectives of both inservice and preservice teachers. The first study explores inservice teachers' knowledge of SEL and perceptions regarding its importance, implementation in the classroom, and teachers' preparedness for teaching SEL. The first study was conducted using a sample of 170 inservice teachers from various schools located in the Southwest region of the United States. Teachers were provided an online link and given two weeks to complete the survey. Results were examined using both descriptive and inferential statistics and indicated inservice teachers had some underlying knowledge of SEL. The results also showed that inservice teachers felt SEL was important, but they were less sure about how it should be implemented.

The second study examines preservice teachers' knowledge of SEL and their perceptions regarding its importance, implementation, and their preparedness for teaching SEL. A sample of 155 preservice teachers was obtained from a large university in the Southwest region of the United States. Preservice teachers were provided an online link and given one to two weeks to complete the survey. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to examine the results. Similar to inservice teachers, the results indicated preservice teachers had some underlying knowledge of SEL and felt it was important but may have had some confusion regarding its implementation. Additionally, preservice teachers overwhelmingly indicated they felt underprepared to teach SEL.

Before exploring results from both studies, it is important to examine the literature on SEL and its implications on students' academic success. The structure of the present dissertation will follow accordingly; First, I will examine the literature regarding SEL, why it is important to academic attainment, and why it should be included in preservice preparation programs. Next, the methods, results, and brief discussions will be presented for both studies. Finally, I will offer conclusions, limitations, and directions for future research regarding SEL.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In the current review I define social emotional learning (SEL) and review its components. Next, I discuss the teacher's role in SEL and how the classroom context affects implementation. Finally, I discuss how SEL affects literacy acquisition and how teacher knowledge of SEL supports effective practice.

#### OVERVIEW OF SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a non-profit organization that works to promote the practice of SEL in classrooms through close collaboration of prominent researchers in the area, and has been influential in developing the current guidelines for SEL instruction. CASEL (2007) asserts that SEL includes the teaching of several components that encourage effectiveness in life and relationships with others. Specifically, in collaboration with CASEL, Payton, Weissberg, Durlak, Dymnicki, Taylor, et al. (2008) recognize five distinct components of SEL. These include (a) self-awareness, (b) social awareness, (c) self-management, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision-making. Additionally, SEL is defined as the process of acquiring social, emotional, and academic competence through the development of skills such as self-regulation, persistence, and adaptability (Elias, Zins, Weissberg, Frey, Greenberg, et al. 1997).



Much research in SEL is grounded in Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, which proposes that individual performance is based on a sequence of reciprocal interactions between personal, environmental, and behavioral influences. Specifically, personal beliefs can have an affect on behavioral choices and environmental factors can affect personal beliefs or vice versa. The way in which students process all of these factors has a great impact on their everyday interactions and can have profound affects on academic attainment. For example, a student who is unable to read a difficult book (behavior) may conclude that they are unable to succeed at reading on any level (belief) and therefore develop low self-efficacy in reading. This is an example of how one component of SEL (self-efficacy) can impact academic achievement. In the preceding example, the student with low self-efficacy in reading may then avoid the reading task, which further hinders reading development. The following subsection reviews the components of social emotional learning and how each of them relates to one another.

#### COMPONENTS OF SEL

To summarize, social and emotional learning is constructed from many factors including (but not limited to) those related to emotional development and management, interpersonal relationships, handling challenging situations, responsible decision making, and ethics (CASEL, 2007). For the purpose of this literature review, I focus on two main components of SEL: self-regulation and self-efficacy, because, in previous research, they are most related to gains in learning. Self-efficacy is viewed to be an

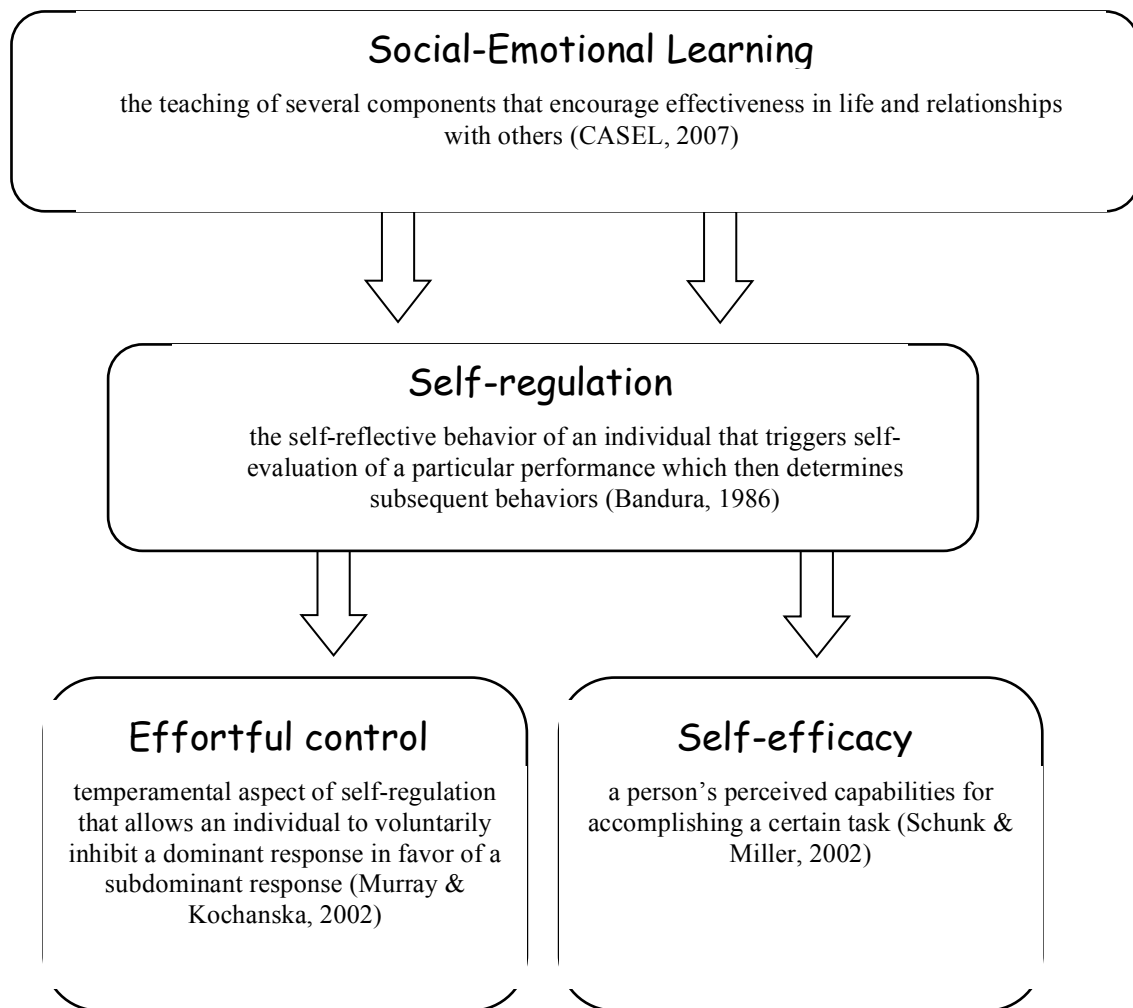
element of self-regulation (see Figure 1 for an overview of the self-regulation and self-efficacy constructs).

Self-regulation, as defined by the constructs of Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, is the self-reflective behavior of an individual that triggers self-evaluation of a particular performance, which then determines subsequent behaviors. In other words, self-regulation refers to how individuals exert control over their thoughts, feelings, and actions. Self-regulation is then made up of several components including effortful control, executive function, and inhibitory control. These factors can influence student academic behaviors including motivation and goal setting (Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992).

A primary component in the study of self-regulation and academic attainment is effortful control. Effortful control refers to a temperamental aspect of self-regulation that allows an individual to voluntarily inhibit a dominant response in favor of a subdominant response (Murray & Kochanska, 2002). In the classroom, effortful control would be exhibited in a child's ability to quietly raise their hand to answer a question rather than calling out.

Another component of self-regulation is self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to a person's perceived capabilities for accomplishing a certain task (Schunk & Miller, 2002). Self-efficacy is task-specific and can be thought of in terms of how well students believe they would perform at a specific undertaking. For example, a child may have high self-efficacy for reading a specified book but low self-efficacy for performing a complex math problem. Self-efficacy is thought to affect how students choose what tasks

to perform, how much effort they will exert, and their level of persistence. It is also hypothesized to have an affect on academic achievement (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007; Zimmerman, Bandura, & Martinez-Pons, 1992). The components of SEL and how they are related are summarized below in Figure 1.



**Figure 1** Hierarchical Structure of Social Emotional Learning Components

## SEL AND ACADEMIC RESILIENCE

In the following subsection, I move from discussing components of SEL to how these components affect academic resilience. I define the term **academic resilience** and discuss its role in academic achievement.

### DEFINING ACADEMIC RESILIENCE

Academic resilience is a broad term related to self-efficacy in regards to how students perceive their ability to accomplish specific tasks and how this affects academic success.

A commonly used definition of academic resilience is “the heightened likelihood of success in school and other life accomplishments despite environmental adversities brought about by early traits, conditions, and experiences” (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994, p. 46). In other words, academic resilience is the ability to obtain academic success despite the existence of other adverse conditions. Academically resilient students are those that understand they are in charge of their own learning and will persist in the face of challenge (McTigue, Washburn, & Liew, 2009). An academically resilient student also has the skills to regulate their own behavior in order to maximize the amount of learning that can take place. In other words, academically resilient students are self-regulators. For example, students in a small reading group who are able to inhibit the impulse to call out or jump out of their seats are displaying self-regulation. Being able to follow directions, listen to the teacher, and interact in an appropriate manner allows students to get more out of lessons and increase their academic attainment (McClelland et al., 2007).

## SEL COMPONENTS AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND RESILIENCE

A review by Waxman, Gray, and Padron (2003) asserts students who were academically resilient were more likely to demonstrate personal characteristics such as enthusiasm, attentiveness, persistence, and good interpersonal skills. It is clear that these characteristics are closely linked to the skills taught in an SEL program. It may also indicate that social emotional skills can contribute not only to academic achievement but also to the ability to overcome adverse social situations in order to become successful academically. In the next subsection, I discuss how each of the specific components of SEL may contribute to academic achievement and academic resilience.

Aspects of self-regulation have been found to have possible links to future academic achievement (Liew et al., 2008; Liew & McTigue, 2009; Valiente, Lemery-Chalfant, Swanson, & Reiser, 2008). A temperamental component of self-regulation, effortful control, has been found to be related to students' academic performance. A study by Valiente et al. (2008) found significant positive correlations between students' measures of effortful control and measures of academic competence. Such findings support the idea that self-regulation is important in academic attainment in that students who are able to control their attention and/or behavior are more likely to be able to focus on a particular learning task and are therefore more likely to succeed in school. When facing challenges at school that may distract students' attention, higher effortful control can be beneficial for allowing students to focus on learning.

Additionally, Liew and McTigue (2009) assert that beginning in preschool, students' need for self-regulation begins to increase. The school environment demands that students be able to operate effectively in their surroundings in order to thrive. These demands include social and academic components that can be negatively affected by lack of self-regulation skills. It is true that being able to regulate one's behavior during a reading lesson is important for acquiring the knowledge being presented, but it is also true that students' social skills are vital in the learning process. Students with higher self-regulation are less likely to demonstrate behaviors such as noncompliance and aggression, which can inhibit learning.

Academically resilient students also hold the belief that they can attain desired goals. In other words, academically resilient learners have high self-efficacy. These students are more able to persist in the face of challenge because they believe they are capable of success (Schunk & Miller, 2002). According to Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, and Pastorelli (1996), whether or not children believe they possess the ability to regulate their own learning has affects on academic motivation, interest levels, and achievement in school. The higher students' self-efficacy, the more likely they are to choose difficult tasks, persist in the face of challenge, and show an interest for the process of learning.

The results of several studies indicate that self-efficacy beliefs can impact students' academic attainment. Zimmerman, Bandura, and Martinez-Pons (1992) used path analysis to determine the causal role of students' self-efficacy beliefs and academic goals in academic attainment. They found that students with higher self-efficacy for self-

regulated learning had higher self-efficacy for academic achievement. This in turn influenced the academic goals they set for themselves and, consequently, their level of academic attainment. This indicates that academic achievement is highly connected to perceived self-efficacy.

Additionally, Luo, Hughes, Liew, and Kwok (2009) studied kindergarten students' engagement types and their effects on academic achievement. Students were assessed on their behavioral traits as well as their academic self-efficacy beliefs then categorized into one of four engagement types: cooperative, resistive, enthusiastic, and disaffected. Students in the enthusiastic group scored highest on academic self-efficacy and outperformed the resistive and disaffected groups on reading assessments in the first grade. These findings, in concert, support the assertion that self-efficacy beliefs can have positive influences on academic achievement.

## SEL AND READING ACHIEVEMENT

In the following subsection I move from research on SEL and academic achievement in general, to work specifically relating SEL and reading achievement. Most educators would cite phonological awareness and letter knowledge as the best predictors of future reading ability. Although these literacy skills are indeed essential for the future development of reading ability, without the proper behavioral attributes to execute the use of these skills, they may be useless. Therefore, certain personality traits may be just as, if not more, important than basic language concepts such as phonological awareness

and letter knowledge (Niemi & Poskiparta, 2002). This makes SEL an essential component to reading instruction (Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007).

Learning to read is a complicated process that requires students to employ many skills at one time in order to succeed. For example, when students come to a word they are unfamiliar with they must use their prior knowledge to identify clues to help them decode the word correctly while simultaneously considering context clues to confirm their decoding. Additionally, the English language is filled with challenging rules and irregular words that make decoding difficult. This means that students may come across many challenges while attempting to read an unfamiliar word, sentence, or page and need to be academically resilient in order to persevere (McTigue, Washburn, & Liew, 2009). Many commonly taught English language “rules”, such as, “when two vowels go walking, the first one does the talking”, often do not apply in all situations. This can lead to confusion and frustration on the part of early readers. In order to promote academic resilience, and reduce frustration in reading acquisition, SEL should be an essential component to reading instruction and several recent studies support this notion.

Blair and Razza (2007) measured several aspects of student self-regulation along with reading and math components during the preschool and kindergarten years. The results indicated that students’ measurements of effortful control were related to attainment of letter knowledge between Head Start preschool and kindergarten. The authors also asserted that the relation between self-regulation aspects and letter knowledge was so great that those students who scored low on letter knowledge were easily distinguishable by low scores on self-regulation components. This may indicate



that children who are lacking early letter knowledge are characterized by challenges with their self-regulation.

McClelland et al. (2007) measured preschool students on aspects of behavioral self-regulation and investigated relationships between these scores and literacy, vocabulary, and math scores on a standardized exam. The results indicated that measures of self-regulation positively predicted scores on the standardized exam. Additionally, the standardized exam was administered during both the fall and spring semesters of students' preschool year and behavioral regulation components not only predicted scores for both semesters, but also, growth in self-regulation components predicted growth in exam scores during the school year.

Most recently, Liew et al. (2008) conducted a longitudinal study that examined the link between students' self-regulatory processes and achievement between first and third grade. The researchers found associations between self-efficacy beliefs and literacy achievement in first and second grade. Additionally, they examined the simultaneous contributions of self-efficacy beliefs and effortful control over the three-year span. They found that measures of effortful control in first grade contributed to positive self-efficacy in second grade, which in turn contributed to higher literacy skills in third grade.

The results of these studies support the concept that self-regulation and self-efficacy skills are beneficial in reading instruction, and imply such skills should be taught within an SEL curriculum for young learners. The early development of self-regulatory abilities appears to enhance early reading skills. In summary, self-regulation

can play an important role in reading development by fostering skills such as persistence, motivation, and an increased level of effort.

#### CAN TEACHERS HAVE AN AFFECT ON STUDENTS' TEMPERAMENTS?

Thus far, I have focused on the connections between social emotional learning and academic achievement. However, if students are already born with a predisposed temperament, is it even possible for teachers to cultivate positive social emotional traits in their students? In short, yes.

Although each student is unique and will react to social emotional instruction in varying ways, individual distinctions in temperament can be offset by a student's environment (i.e. their teacher) (Liew, Chen, & Hughes 2010; Valiente et al., 2008). In other words, positive student-teacher relationships can have a marked effect on the academic achievement of students, even when they are classified as at-risk. Therefore, it is worth the effort of teachers to foster positive relationships with their students and incorporate social emotional learning components into the curriculum as a means to increasing academic achievement.

#### THE TEACHER'S ROLE IN PROMOTING SEL IN READING INSTRUCTION

The teacher's role in integrating SEL and literacy instruction is a vital component to its success and long-lasting academic gains for students. The teacher must be able to create an environment in which both social emotional learning and literacy instruction take place successfully. There are several research-based techniques recommended for

creating such a classroom, and in the following subsections I address teacher feedback and student-teacher relationships.

Surprisingly, something as simple as the type of praise can make a big difference in students' long-term success. Many educators today feel that praising students for their intelligence will increase motivation and performance by creating a confidence boost for kids (Dweck, 2007). Research by Mueller and Dweck (1998) indicates the opposite may be true and that praising students for their intelligence decreases motivation to learn. Specifically, Mueller and Dweck (1998) conducted a study in which they had two sets of children perform the same task and receive praise for either their ability (i.e. "You must be smart at these problems") and the second group praised for effort (i.e. "You must have worked hard at these problems"). The researchers then examined students on factors such as whether they subsequently chose a learning or performance goal task, their motivation, persistence, attribution of failure, and enjoyment of the tasks. Students praised for their effort scored better in each of these categories than students praised for their intelligence. This indicates that students praised for effort tend to derive more enjoyment from the learning process, attribute failure to lack of effort rather than lack of ability, persist more in the face of challenge, display more motivation, and choose learning goal tasks that focus on the process of learning than students praised for intelligence.

These findings about praise and verbal feedback are particularly important to reading instruction, as students will face many obstacles during early literacy instruction such as irregular words, complicated letter patterns, and unfamiliar vocabulary. The

ability to persist in the face of challenge is necessary and increased motivation and enjoyment of learning can all help students succeed in reading acquisition.

In addition to teacher language, student-teacher relationships are essential in successfully integrating SEL with reading instruction. Teachers can have a positive impact on students' school performance through the relationships they foster. It is essential that teachers create a safe environment so that all students feel comfortable taking learning risks and are secure that their individual needs are being met (Cohen, 2006; McTigue, Washburn, & Liew, 2009). Additionally, it is important for teachers to get to know their students on an individual basis (Denham & Weissberg, 2004). This allows teachers to adapt lessons for each child's individual needs and know the child's strengths and weaknesses in SEL components. Students who feel comfortable in their learning environment may be more likely to try out new skills, be encouraged to persist, and experience higher levels of motivation. As documented previously, these traits can have positive impacts on students' learning.

#### TEACHER EDUCATION AND SEL

It is important for teachers, beginning from their preservice training, to understand the important links between SEL and academic achievement, particularly in reading instruction. SEL is essential in creating learners who are academically resilient and capable of facing challenging academic tasks with persistence. Proper teacher training and integration of SEL can help further students in their academic achievements.

Since the emerging research indicates that SEL can have positive effects on students' academic performance, it is important to address whether or not teachers are being adequately prepared to teach SEL in their classrooms. If self-regulation and self-efficacy are linked to higher gains in reading achievement then they must also be considered an essential component to classroom instruction. In order to foster learning, especially literacy, SEL should ideally be viewed as an integral part of instruction and not as separate from the academic curriculum. Teachers must be made aware early in the preservice coursework that the social, emotional, and academic aspects of learning are deeply intertwined and cannot be divided.

First, teachers need to feel that SEL is a worthwhile cause. Whether or not they choose to implement SEL strategies in their classroom may begin with this very idea. Buchanan, Guelnder, Tran, and Merrell (2009) found that 69% of teachers surveyed believed SEL should be taught in their classroom while the remaining teachers (24%) responded with "don't know" when asked this question. When asked if they felt SEL was important to be successful in school and life, nearly 99% of them answered with a "yes". This indicates that the large majority of teachers feel SEL is an important academic and life skill, but a substantially smaller number of teachers think they should be teaching it in their classrooms. Although we cannot determine the exact cause of this discrepancy, we can speculate that teachers do not yet realize the important connection that social and emotional learning has with academic instruction. This deficit may begin with teacher preparation programs. If preservice teachers are not taught the importance

of SEL and the long-lasting impact it can have on students' learning, they are certainly less likely to implement it in their classrooms.

A recent survey of university faculty asked professors teaching undergraduate early childhood (i.e., birth to eight years of age) education students to rate the preparedness of their undergraduate students for teaching SEL topics such as developing social skills, emotional awareness, and self-regulation (Hemmeter, Santos, & Ostrosky, 2008). Professors indicated that they felt their undergraduates were very prepared for teaching SEL topics in the classrooms, but they did note that integrating these topics in their teachings was sometimes challenging due to lack of room in the curriculum. These findings indicate, again, that SEL is deemed important but implementation into the curriculum may be a concern.

Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, Fredricks, et al. (2003) discuss several reasons that exist for the lack of implementation of SEL in today's classrooms. First, SEL is often introduced as an isolated component of teaching rather than an integral part of instruction. If SEL is presented separately from the academic curriculum, teachers will struggle to not only see the important connection between SEL and academic achievement, but they will also have difficulty finding the time to make sure SEL is incorporated. Ideally, SEL would be implemented in the form of daily integration with instruction due to the fact that the integration approach considers the whole picture of learning including social, emotional, and academic aspects.

Finally, there is often a lack of support provided to teachers for incorporating SEL into the classroom (Greenberg et al., 2003). SEL issues need to be purposefully

linked to the educational goals of a classroom and should be supported by the school's administration. Proper supervision, training, and evaluation of SEL instruction should be in place so that teachers feel supported in their efforts to implement it. Preservice teacher education should be the place in which educators begin to learn about and understand the importance of SEL in the classroom.

## CHAPTER III

### STUDY 1:

#### INSERVICE TEACHER KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTIONS OF SEL

##### PURPOSE

The purpose of the present study was to assess what inservice teachers knew about components of social emotional learning, and what their perceptions of SEL were in regards to implementation, importance, and preparedness for teaching SEL. This study was also interested in examining teachers' perceptions of student-teacher relationships and their importance to academic achievement. The following questions were examined: (1) How familiar are teachers with terminology and concepts regarding SEL? (2) What are teachers' perceptions regarding SEL's importance to academic achievement? (3) What are teachers' perceptions regarding their preparedness for teaching SEL? (4) What are teachers' perceptions regarding implementation of SEL? (5) What are teachers' perceptions regarding the importance of student-teacher relationships to academic achievement? (6) Are there differences by number of years teaching, certification type, and content area on teachers' overall knowledge of SEL scores? (7) Are there differences by number of years teaching, certification type, and content area on teachers' perceptions of SEL's importance, their preparedness to teach it, and SEL's implementation? (8) Do teachers' perceptions of SEL's importance, their preparedness to teach it, and its implementation predict overall knowledge scores on concepts of SEL?



and (9) Is there a relationship between teachers' perceived knowledge of SEL and their actual knowledge?

## METHODS

In the following subsections I discuss methodology related to the present study. I present information regarding participants, survey development, data collection, and analysis.

## PARTICIPANTS

Participants for the study were 170 elementary inservice teachers who were recruited from 42 public and two private schools representing 20 school districts. Each school was located in a state within the southwestern region of the United States. Teachers were recruited from multiple types of districts: 46% of the teachers surveyed taught in urban area school districts; 45% taught in suburban areas; and 8% taught in rural areas. Sixty-seven percent of teachers taught in a Title I-funded school, which is similar to statewide statistics - in 2009, 56% of schools within the state were funded by Title-I. (Texas Education Agency, 2009).

The majority of participants in the study were female (97%) which is relatively high compared to state and national statistics in which 88% and 87% of teachers are female respectively (TEA, 2009; NCES, 2009). Regarding ethnicity/race, white teachers made up the majority of the sample at 61% with the remaining sample being 18% Hispanic, 15% black, and 6% other. This racial distribution is more diverse than national statistics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009) but is similar to the state in

which the teaching force was reported by the state agency in 2009 as being 67% white, 22% Hispanic, 9% black, and 4% other (TEA, 2009).

Of the teachers surveyed, 49% taught in self-contained classrooms where instruction was provided in all subject areas and 33% taught in content specific classrooms (e.g., Math/Science, English/Language Arts). The remaining 18% taught in specialized areas such as gifted and talented or special education. Regarding teacher preparation, 71% of the participants had completed a traditional four-year degree in education and 28% were certified to teach through alternative certification programs. The participants' teacher preparation routes are similar to statewide statistics: In 2009, 63% of teachers were traditionally certified, 21% were alternatively certified, and the remaining 16% had completed some type of post-baccalaureate program (TEA).

## INSTRUMENTATION

In the following subsections, I discuss development of the online survey used to collect data regarding teachers' knowledge and perceptions of SEL. I also address the final structure of the survey and data collection procedures.

## SURVEY DEVELOPMENT

The survey was originally developed by the researcher and based on questionnaires created by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) group (Elias et al., 1997). These questionnaires were designed as a guide for schools to reflect on SEL practices in their classrooms. Additionally, the format of the knowledge

questions, regarding SEL terminology, were modeled after a survey by Joshi, Binks, Hougen, Dahlgren, Ocker-Dean, and Smith (2009) in which teacher knowledge of reading terminology was measured. Correct definitions for the SEL knowledge questions were created from descriptions of SEL terms from previously published work in the field (e.g., McTigue, Washburn, & Liew, 2009; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007) and from information provided on the CASEL website.

The survey development then proceeded through several stages. First, several educational researchers reviewed the survey. These professionals were knowledgeable in the field of social emotional learning and provided information on content and format. Next, a pilot study was conducted. Fourteen inservice teachers were recruited for participation in a pilot study. Each teacher was asked to take the survey and provide qualitative feedback regarding the layout and wording of items. Feedback from all participants was used to update the survey in an effort to ensure all pertinent areas of SEL were covered and the knowledge questions were discriminatory.

Revisions were made in three areas: (a) Questions were added to the perceptions and implementation scale to include information on student-teacher relationships. (b) Answer options from two of the knowledge scale questions were modified for difficulty. (c) One of the definition questions on the knowledge scale was modified to be more uniform with other definitions. Analysis of inter-item reliability ( $\alpha = .77$ ) was also run and found to be adequate.

## INSTRUMENT

The final survey was comprised of 44 questions divided into two sections: (a) teacher knowledge of SEL and (b) teacher perceptions (i.e., opinions) of SEL.

The Teacher Knowledge portion of the survey measured teachers' knowledge of social emotional learning terms as well as how they may be applied in the classroom. This portion of the survey consisted of 18 questions presented in three formats: Six questions required teachers to match SEL terms with corresponding definitions; seven questions required teachers to identify examples of SEL; and the remaining five provided classroom vignettes in which teachers must identify the response most appropriate for SEL development.

The teacher perception portion of the survey measured teachers' perceptions of the importance of SEL instruction; how prepared they felt to teach SEL; and how it may be implemented in the classroom. Twenty-six questions were included in the teacher perception section of the survey: 10 items pertained to teachers' perceptions of the importance of teaching SEL; five questions pertained to how prepared teachers felt to teach SEL; and eight questions related to implementation of SEL in the classroom. A factor analysis was performed to create three separate scales of teacher perceptions of SEL's importance, their preparedness for teaching SEL, and implementation of SEL. Remaining items pertaining to preservice teachers' perceptions of student-teacher relationships were examined descriptively.

## DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Initial contact with teachers was made through two approaches. Prior to the beginning of the study the researcher obtained permission from principals in three schools throughout the state to disseminate the survey. These school districts were not affiliated with a university. Second, the researcher obtained permission from the director of student teaching at a large university to contact teachers within the state who served as mentors to student teachers.

Once the Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted approval for the survey, administration of the survey occurred early in the spring 2011 semester. Three hundred and five teachers were sent the survey in the form of e-mail with a hyper-link to the survey. They were given two weeks to complete the survey and a reminder email was sent 3 days prior to the deadline. In order to encourage participation, teachers were offered the option of entering their email address into a drawing for a \$100 gift card. Two hundred and twenty-three of the 305 teachers began the survey, which generated an initial response rate of 73%. However, 53 of these surveys were found to be incomplete and deleted from further analysis yielding a final sample size of 170 teachers, (56% adjusted response rate).

## DATA ANALYSIS

In this subsection I move from development of the survey and data collection to analysis of the data. I discuss reliability and factor analysis results as well as outcome measures for teachers' knowledge and perceptions of SEL.

## RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

Cronbach's alpha was obtained to determine the inter-item reliability of the teacher knowledge portion of the survey. The reliability coefficient of the knowledge scale was .55. According to Nunnally (1978), anything below .7 would indicate low reliability. Previous survey studies in this area have not reported reliability coefficients, making it difficult to discern if the low reliability was due to the survey design or a function of the subject matter (Buchanan et al., 2009).

## FACTOR ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTION SCALES

Regarding the perceptions scale, a factor analysis using SPSS software was run in order to determine underlying factors and verify the survey's practicality in measuring teacher perceptions of SEL. Items regarding teacher perceptions of the importance of SEL, teacher perceptions of their preparedness for teaching SEL, and perceptions of implementation of SEL were grouped a-priori and examined using factor analysis.

Analysis of eight items for the teacher perceptions of importance scale indicated two factors contributing to 69% of the variance. The first factor included six items pertaining to teachers' perceptions of the importance of SEL to academic achievement while two items in the second factor pertained to teachers' perceptions of SEL **not** being important to academic achievement. Factor loadings were .79 and .71 respectively (see Table 1).

**Table 1** Factor Loadings of Teacher Perceptions of Importance Scale

Item	Perceptions of SEL being Important to Achievement	Perceptions of SEL not being Important to Achievement
SEL is important.	.81	
SEL is as important as academic learning.	.77	
Academic achievement is highly linked to SEL.	.83	
SEL contributes to Reading Achievement.	.81	
Reading achievement is highly linked to SEL.	.72	
SEL contributes to overall academic achievement.	.81	
Reading achievement is <b>not</b> highly linked to SEL.		.74
Academic achievement is <b>not</b> highly linked to SEL.		.69
Variance	54.17	15.19
Eigenvalue	4.33	1.22

Analysis of five items pertaining to teacher perceptions of preparedness for teaching SEL indicated one factor accounting for 51% of the variance with a factor loading of .71 (see Table 2).

**Table 2** Factor Loadings of Teacher Perceptions of Preparedness Scale

Item	Perceptions of Preparedness
How knowledgeable do you feel regarding SEL?	.68
I feel prepared on how to integrate SEL into reading instruction.	.86
I received instruction on SEL in at least one of my preservice classes.	.64
I have high confidence for teaching SEL.	.85
My school provides the training and resources needed for me to successfully implement SEL.	.50
Variance	51.48
Eigenvalue	2.57

Finally, seven items pertaining to teachers' perceptions of implementation of SEL were examined and indicated two factors accounting for 52% of the variance. Interpretation of factor loadings did not yield any meaningful constructs with four items landing in the first factor and three in the second factor. Values of the factor loadings were .68 and .60 respectively (see Table 3). All remaining questions on the survey were examined descriptively.



**Table 3** Factor Loadings of Teacher Perceptions of Implementation Scale

Item	Perceptions of Implementation (A)	Perceptions of Implementation (B)
(A) Parents should be most responsible for teaching SEL.	.51	
(A) SEL should be taught as a separate curriculum.	.64	
(A) SEL belongs more in the home than in school.	.75	
(A) School counselors should be most responsible for teaching SEL.	.83	
(B) SEL should be integrated into daily instruction.		.72
(B) Teachers should be most responsible for teaching SEL.		.54
(B) My school has a clear purpose for implementing an SEL program.		.55
Variance	32.15	20.17
Eigenvalue	2.25	1.41

#### RELIABILITY OF PERCEPTION SCALES

Additionally, a Cronbach's alpha was obtained to examine internal consistency reliability on each of the three scales as well as an inter-scale correlation to determine discriminant validity. Reliability coefficients of .60, .68, and .46 were obtained for the perceptions of importance, preparedness, and implementation scales, respectively. The mean value of the three coefficients was .58 indicating moderately low reliability among the scales. Inter-scale correlations show two moderate correlations between sets of scales. Although this may indicate the instrument has low discriminant validity and that

each scale does not measure a separate aspect of SEL perceptions, some overlap may be expected due to the nature of the topic. Table 4 demonstrates alpha reliability coefficients and inter-scale correlations for all three scales.

**Table 4** Mean, Standard Deviation, Alpha Reliability and Inter-scale Correlation for Teacher Perception Scales

Scale	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Alpha</u>	<u>Inter-scale correlation</u>		
				Importance	Preparedness	Implementation
Importance	1.79	.32	.60		.33**	.10
Preparedness	2.38	.64	.68			.60**
Implementation	2.59	.41	.46			

## OUTCOME MEASURES

Descriptive statistics on teacher knowledge were examined. In order to ascertain how familiar teachers are with SEL concepts, overall scores (i.e., summed scores) on the knowledge scale were obtained, along with frequency counts on individual items.

Commonly missed questions were analyzed for patterns in incorrect responses that may suggest confusion of specific terms among teachers. Items with high rates of accurate responses were also examined to determine what concepts teachers were most familiar with.

Descriptive statistics were also examined on items regarding teachers' perceptions of student-teacher relationships in order to determine how preservice teachers felt these relationships affect academic achievement. Results were examined by determining the average rating of each item and examining frequency counts.

Descriptive and inferential statistics on teacher perceptions of SEL were examined. Since the interest of the study was to gather information on teachers' perceptions of SEL and how/if they implemented it in the classroom, data were reported on the importance teachers placed on SEL and the extent that teachers felt SEL was linked to academic achievement. Additionally, data on how prepared teachers felt to teach SEL and how they felt about its implementation in the classroom were examined. These questions were based on a Likert-type scale. Results were examined by determining the average rating of each scale and examining frequency counts for individual items.

In order to examine whether certain factors may have an effect on teacher knowledge scores and their overall responses to each of the perception scales, four three-way ANOVA tests were conducted. Differences in overall knowledge scores and responses to perception items were examined by (a) number of years teaching, (b) certification type, and (c) content area taught by the teacher. Number of years teaching was measured categorically with four options including: (a) 0 - 5 years, (b) 6 - 10 years, (c) 11 - 15 years, and (d) 16 or more years. Certification type was measured as either traditional or alternative certification. Regarding content area, teachers were asked to indicate which of the following subjects they were primarily responsible for teaching: (a)

Self-contained (i.e., all subjects taught), (b) Reading/Language Arts, (c) Math, (d) Science/Social Studies, and (e) Special education.

Multiple regression was used to examine associations between teachers' knowledge scores and each of the perception scales. Because the study was interested in exploring the relationship between teachers' knowledge and perceptions of SEL, regression analysis was used to determine whether teachers' total knowledge of SEL scores could be predicted by their responses on each of the perception scales.

In order to examine whether a relationship existed between teachers' perceived knowledge of SEL and their actual knowledge, a Pearson's correlation coefficient was obtained between teachers' ranking of their perceived knowledge of SEL and their actual SEL knowledge score. Specifically, a correlation was run between the responses of the item in which teachers were asked to rate their knowledge level regarding SEL (highly, moderately, and not knowledgeable at all) and teachers' overall scores on the knowledge scale of the survey.

## RESULTS

In the following subsection I discuss findings from the inservice teacher survey. I discuss results from both the knowledge and perception portions of the survey.

### KNOWLEDGE OF SEL TERMS

Descriptive results indicate the average overall score on the SEL knowledge scale was 72% and ranged from 39% to 100%. As shown in Table 5, on a matching task, 71% of

teachers correctly identified the definition of SEL, 72% identified the correct definition of **temperament**, and 73% correctly identified the definition of **self-esteem**. However, teachers demonstrated more difficulty with identifying the correct definitions of the less common terminology: Less than half (41%) of teachers correctly identified the definition of **effortful control**; 54% identified **self-efficacy**; and 42% identified the correct definition of **self-regulation**. Further analysis revealed confusions between certain terminology, specifically, 38% of teachers incorrectly identified **effortful control** as being **self-regulation**.

**Table 5** Teacher Percent Correct Responses on SEL Terminology

Term	Definition	Percent Correct
Effortful Control	Your students' ability to inhibit a dominant response in favor of a less dominant response. For example, waiting their turn to speak instead of calling out.	41%
Self-efficacy	Your students' beliefs that they can effectively perform a specific task. For example, whether or not they believe they can successfully read a difficult book.	54%
Temperament	Your students' emotional, attentional, and behavioral style that remains relatively stable during life but can be shaped by their experiences. For example, the degree of patience they normally exhibit.	72%
Self-esteem	Your students' general perceptions of their overall abilities and attitudes toward themselves. For example, in academics, whether they believe they are smart or not.	73%

**Table 5 Cont.**

Term	Definition	Percent Correct
Self-regulation	Your students' own self-evaluations of a specific performance which then determines their subsequent behaviors. For example, successfully reading a book and then deciding to try one that is more difficult.	42%
Social Emotional Learning	Teaching components that encourage positive relationships in students and teach effective life strategies. For example, teaching students how to be responsible.	71%

#### IDENTIFYING EXAMPLES OF SEL

Teachers demonstrated skill at identifying specific examples of SEL. For this task, participants were given a list of activities and asked to correctly identify which ones were examples of SEL and which ones were not (see Table 6). On six of seven questions, teachers scored at 90% or higher. However, 73% of teachers incorrectly rated the definition of social studies (according to the National Council for the Social Studies) to be a component of SEL.

**Table 6** Teacher Percent Correct Identification of Examples and Non-examples of SEL

Examples	Percent of correct teacher responses	Non-examples	Percent of correct teacher responses
Fostering healthy relationships with others	98%	Instruction in phonemic awareness	94%
Teaching students to monitor their own behaviors	95%	Informal reading assessments	95%
Learning to reflect on thoughts and feelings	96%	The study of social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence	27%

Further descriptive findings indicate teachers are skilled at identifying components of SEL in reading instruction. On average, the teachers performed accurately when given scenarios about SEL and reading instruction and were asked to identify how SEL was incorporated in each setting. For example, teachers were given a scenario in which a teacher was conducting small reading groups and must redirect a student in a way that would encourage development both academically and in SEL. Percent correct scores for each of the questions in this section ranged from 60% to 91%. The areas in which teachers had the most difficulty were recognizing statements and/or feedback that a teacher could make to encourage SEL and identifying whether students were displaying good self-efficacy, self-esteem, or both.

As shown in Table 7, teachers were asked to identify from several examples of teacher feedback, which one was best for encouraging SEL. According to Mueller (2007), the most appropriate praise for fostering academic motivation in students are statements that: (a) Focus on effort rather than intelligence to prevent students from believing their intelligence is a fixed trait that they have no control over, and (b) include specific feedback for the task at hand so that students will know exactly what they have done well so they can repeat it in the future. The large majority (87%) responded correctly indicating teachers were skilled at recognizing the best form of feedback to give students regarding their academic efforts.

**Table 7** Teacher Responses to Identifying Appropriate Teacher Feedback

Teacher Feedback	Percent Responded as Correct
“Great job reading!”	9%
“I really like how you used several strategies.”	87%
“You are so smart!”	3%
“I like being your teacher.”	1%

#### INFLUENCE OF YEARS TEACHING, CERTIFICATION TYPE, AND CONTENT AREA ON KNOWLEDGE SCORES

In order to examine the effects of variables such as number of years teaching, type of teaching certificate, and content area on teachers’ overall knowledge scores, an ANOVA was run using overall knowledge scores as the dependent variable. No significant differences were found for number of years teaching on overall knowledge scores,  $F(3, 117) = .63, ns$ . In other words, teachers performed similarly on the survey’s SEL



knowledge portion regardless of how long they had been teaching. There were also no differences found on total knowledge scores, by type of teaching certificate held  $F(1, 117) = 2.29, ns$ . This indicates that, whether teachers had obtained their teaching certificate through traditional or alternative means, their performance on the knowledge portion of the survey were similar. No differences were found on overall knowledge scores across content areas,  $F(4, 117) = 1.80, ns$ . This result indicates that, no matter what subject teachers primarily taught, there were no differences in how the groups performed on the knowledge portion of the survey. In addition, interaction effects between each of these groups were examined and no significant interactions were found.

#### PREDICTION OF KNOWLEDGE SCORES BY RESPONSES ON PERCEPTION SCALES

Multiple regression was conducted using all three perception scales as independent variables and teachers' overall knowledge scores as the dependent variable as a means to examine whether responses on these three scales can be used to predict overall knowledge scores. Results of the multiple regression indicated that the perception scales did not significantly predict overall knowledge scores, with predictors only accounting for about 2% of the variance ( $R^2 = .04, F(3, 128) = 1.67, ns$ ). These results indicate that responses on each of the perception scales may not be good predictors of teachers' overall knowledge scores (see Table 8).

**Table 8** Multiple Regression Results of Teacher Perception Scales on Total Knowledge of SEL Scores

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
Perception of Importance of SEL	-.79	.70	-.11	-1.13
Perception of Preparedness for Teaching SEL	-.54	.43	-.15	-1.27
Perception of Implementation of SEL	.96	.61	.17	1.56
Multiple Regression <i>R</i>	.20			
Adjusted <i>R Square</i>	.02			

#### PERCEPTIONS OF SEL

Results (reported as “yes” or “no”) indicated that 61% of teachers used some type of SEL program at their school. The remaining questions pertaining to perceptions of SEL were measured on a four-point Likert-type scale (1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Disagree, 4 = Strongly Disagree) and divided into three scales: (a) Perceptions of implementation, (b) Perceptions of preparedness for teaching SEL, and (c) Perceptions of SEL’s importance. Results for these three scales are reported with both overall means from each scale and frequency counts for individual items.

#### PERCEPTIONS OF IMPLEMENTATION

A mean score for teachers’ responses to items on the perceptions of implementation scale was obtained to determine students’ overall beliefs regarding implementation of

SEL (see Table 4). The average rating on this scale was 2.59 indicating, overall, teachers tended to disagree slightly more with statements regarding implementation of SEL.

Descriptive results indicate that 96% of teachers either agreed or strongly agreed that SEL should be integrated into daily classroom instruction. However, when asked who is **most** responsible for teaching SEL, 72% agreed or strongly agreed that it should be parents; 40% agreed or strongly agreed that it should be teachers; and only 19% believed school counselors should be most responsible. (Note that choices were not mutually exclusive). However, regarding the statement that SEL belonged more in the home than in school, 81% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Results are reported in Table 9.

**Table 9** Teacher Beliefs of SEL's Implementation

Statement	Percent of Teacher Responses			
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
SEL should be integrated into daily instruction.	57%	39%	2%	1%
SEL should be taught as a separate curriculum.	3%	14%	63%	20%
Teachers should be most responsible for teaching SEL.	6%	34%	54%	5%
Parents should be most responsible for teaching SEL.	15%	57%	22%	3%

**Table 9 Cont.**

Statement	<u>Percent of Teacher Responses</u>			
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
School counselors should be most responsible for teaching SEL.	4%	15%	66%	14%
SEL belongs more in the home than in school.	3%	14%	66%	15%

#### INFLUENCE OF NUMBER OF YEARS TEACHING, CERTIFICATION TYPE, AND CONTENT AREA ON PERCEPTIONS OF IMPLEMENTATION

In order to examine the effects of the number of years teaching, certification type, and content area, a three-way ANOVA was run with responses to the perceptions of implementation scale as the dependent variable. Due to missing values on survey responses, the sample size for this analysis was 122 (72% of total sample). No significant differences were found on responses to items pertaining to the implementation of SEL for number of years teaching or for certification type,  $F_s(3, 95)$  and  $(1, 95) = .21$  and  $.09$ , *ns*. In other words, regardless of the number of years a teacher has been teaching and whether a teacher was certified traditionally or alternatively, they did not feel differently regarding the implementation of SEL. Similar results were found for content area. No effects were found on teachers' responses to items regarding implementation of SEL by the content area they were mostly responsible for teaching,

$F(4, 95) = .30, ns$ . In addition, interaction effects between each of these groups were examined and no significant interactions were found.

#### PERCEPTIONS OF PREPAREDNESS

A mean score for teachers' responses to items on the perceptions of preparedness scale was obtained to determine students' overall beliefs regarding implantation of SEL (see Table 4). The average rating on this scale was 2.38 indicating, overall, teachers tended to agree slightly more with statements regarding their preparation for teaching SEL.

Regarding teachers preparation for SEL, results indicate that 71% of teachers surveyed felt they are prepared to integrate SEL into classroom reading instruction and 65% either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I have high confidence for teaching SEL". However, further analysis indicates the majority (59%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they received instruction on SEL in at least one class during their preservice coursework (see Table 10).

**Table 10** Teacher Perceptions of Preparation for Teaching SEL

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I feel prepared on how to integrate SEL into my reading instruction.	25%	47%	22%	5%
I have high confidence for teaching SEL.	17%	48%	28%	5%
I received instruction on SEL in at least one of my preservice classes.	6%	39%	31%	23%

Furthermore, of the teachers who reported implementing an SEL program at their school (59%), less than half (49%) agreed or strongly agreed that their school provides adequate training and resources needed to successfully implement the program. An additional 33% indicated they weren't sure whether or not they received enough training (see Table 11).

**Table 11** Teacher Perceptions of SEL Training Provided by Their School

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not Sure	NA
My school provides the training and resources needed for me to successfully implement an SEL program.	10%	39%	15%	1%	32%	3%

Regarding where teachers felt they had gained their knowledge on SEL, the largest percentage (37%) indicated their knowledge had come from interactions with students in their own classrooms. Only 11% reported preservice coursework as their main source of information on SEL and another 22% reported not being able to recall any instruction in SEL at all (see Table 12).

**Table 12** Teacher Perceptions of Where They Obtained Knowledge of SEL

	Preservice Coursework	Staff Development	Interactions with Students	Interactions with Other Teachers	Other	Do not recall any instruction
Where do you believe most of your knowledge of SEL came from?	11%	11%	37%	11%	5%	22%

#### INFLUENCE OF NUMBER OF YEARS TEACHING, CERTIFICATION TYPE, AND CONTENT AREA ON PERCEPTIONS OF PREPAREDNESS

In order to examine the effects of teachers' years of experience, certification type, and content area, a three-way ANOVA was run with responses to the perceptions of preparedness for teaching SEL scale as the dependent variable. Due to missing values on survey responses and an unbalanced design, the sample size for this analysis was only 126 (74% of total sample). No differences were found by number of years teaching on responses to items pertaining to teachers' perceptions of preparedness for teaching SEL,  $F(3, 99) = .1.68, ns$ . In other words, regardless of the number of years teachers have been in the classroom, their responses to items pertaining to preparedness for teaching of SEL will be similar. No differences were found by certification type on teachers' responses,  $F(1, 99) = .00, ns$ , indicating that teachers certified traditionally and alternatively, will respond similarly to items regarding preparedness. Similar results



were found for content area. No differences were found on teachers' responses to items regarding preparedness by content area,  $F(4, 99) = .32, ns$ , indicating teachers who teach specific content areas do not feel more or less prepared than teachers who teach other content areas. In addition, interaction effects between each of these groups were examined and no significant interactions were found.

#### PERCEPTIONS OF IMPORTANCE

A mean score for teachers' responses to items on the perceptions of importance scale was obtained to determine students' overall beliefs regarding the importance of SEL (see Table 4). The average rating on this scale was 1.79, indicating teachers tended to, overall, agree more with statements regarding the importance of SEL.

Results on teachers' perceptions of the value of SEL indicate they feel it is important in academic achievement. All teachers reported that they felt SEL is important and 99% agreed or strongly agreed that it was **as** important as academic learning. Additionally, 95% agreed or strongly agreed that academic achievement is highly linked to SEL and 91% also felt it was highly linked to reading achievement. Finally, 94% of teachers reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that SEL contributes to overall academic achievement. These results are outlined in Table13.

**Table 13** Teacher Perceptions of SEL's Importance

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
SEL is important.	70%	30%	0%	0%
SEL is as important as academic learning.	60%	37%	2%	0%
Academic achievement is highly linked to SEL.	56%	39%	1%	0%
Reading achievement is highly linked to SEL.	30%	61%	5%	1%
SEL contributes to overall academic achievement.	50%	46%	3%	1%
SEL contributes to Reading Achievement.	47%	51%	1%	1%
Academic achievement is not highly linked to SEL.	4%	6%	54%	36%
Reading achievement is not highly linked to SEL.	2%	10%	57%	31%

## INFLUENCE OF NUMBER OF YEARS TEACHING, CERTIFICATION TYPE, AND CONTENT AREA ON PERCEPTIONS OF IMPORTANCE

In order to examine the effects of teachers' years of experience, certification type, and content area, a three-way ANOVA was run with responses to the perceptions of importance scale as the dependent variable. Due to missing values on survey responses and an unbalanced design, the sample size for this analysis was only 131 (77% of total sample). No differences were found by number of years teaching on responses to items pertaining to teachers' perceptions of the importance of SEL,  $F(3, 104) = .39, ns$ . This may indicate that, regardless of the number of years teachers have been in the classroom, they will not respond differently to items pertaining to the importance of SEL. No differences were found on teachers' responses to items on the preparedness scale by certification type,  $F(1, 104) = .26, ns$ , possibly indicating that, regardless of whether teachers are certified traditionally or alternatively, they will not feel differently regarding the importance of SEL. Similar results were found for content area. No differences were found on teachers' responses to items regarding importance by the content area,  $F(4, 104) = .54, ns$ . In other words, teachers who teach specific content areas do not feel that SEL is more or less important than teachers who teach other content areas. In addition, interaction effects between each of these groups were examined and no significant interactions were found.

## PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

Teachers' perceptions of the importance of student-teacher relationships and their affect on academic achievement were also examined. The results overwhelmingly indicated that teachers felt strong student-teacher relationships could have a positive effect on academic outcomes. Nearly all teachers agreed with all three statements regarding relationships including, "Positive student-teacher relationships are important for enhancing students' academic success", "A student's sense of support from the teacher can have an impact on their academic success", and "Creating a classroom where students feel a sense of belonging can foster academic success" (see Table 14). These results indicate that teachers have a strong understanding of the importance of the socio-emotional aspect of teaching, at least in regards to the relationships fostered between students and teachers.

**Table 14** Teacher Perceptions of Student-Teacher Relationships

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Positive student-teacher relationships are important for enhancing students' academic success.	82%	16%	1%	0%
A student's sense of support from the teacher can have an impact on their academic success.	71%	27%	1%	1%
Creating a classroom where students feel a sense of belonging can foster academic success.	80%	19%	1%	0%

#### RELATIONSHIP OF PERCEIVED AND ACTUAL KNOWLEDGE

To examine the link between teachers' perceived knowledge of SEL and their actual knowledge, a Pearson's correlation test was run between perceived knowledge of SEL and teachers' actual scores on the knowledge scale. The majority of teachers (60%) reported being moderately knowledgeable of SEL while 23% reported they felt highly knowledgeable. As reported earlier, teachers performed on average at 72% on the knowledge scale. However, results indicated a non-significant correlation between the

two scores,  $r(168) = .14$ , *ns*, meaning that there is no direct connection between teachers' perceived level of knowledge regarding SEL and their actual overall knowledge scores.

## DISCUSSION

The present study provides evidence that many teachers recognize the importance of SEL, but are less sure of how to implement it in their own classrooms. It also provides evidence that there may be a lack of preservice preparation in regards to teaching SEL. Of particular concern is teachers' inability to identify some fundamental SEL terms and concepts. However, many teachers are able to correctly identify SEL components in the context of classroom scenarios indicating an underlying understanding of how SEL impacts successful classroom instruction.

## KNOWLEDGE OF SEL

Is it really necessary for teachers to have knowledge of definitions regarding SEL in order for them to effectively implement SEL? According to Bloom's taxonomy, the recognition of a concept's definition is considered to be a very basic level of understanding (Bloom, 1956). In order to recognize how specific elements of SEL are related to academic attainment, a fundamental understanding of SEL terminology is required before a teacher can successfully implement it in the classroom. Correctly identifying specific SEL definitions was more difficult for teachers than recognizing SEL in the context of reading instruction. This may indicate that teachers often could

recognize what SEL may look like in the classroom but were less skilled at specifically describing and understanding the psychological processes that underlie SEL. This may reflect a limited depth of knowledge. As demonstrated by teachers' confusion of several closely tied terms (e.g., self-efficacy/self-esteem & self-regulation/effortful control) teachers do not seem to possess the appropriate depth of knowledge to make accurate distinctions between these concepts. Making an analogy to literacy instruction, this is similar to teachers recognizing that a phonics lesson can help students learn to make letter-sound connections, but would not be able to aptly discern between the related concepts of phonemic awareness, phonological awareness and phonics. Accordingly, teachers may understand that having good self-efficacy and self-esteem are beneficial to students in a learning environment but they may not understand the more nuanced aspects, such that self-efficacy is typically task-specific (i.e., a student's belief about whether or not they can read a specific text) and self-esteem refers to students' general disposition (i.e., whether students they believe they are smart).

These terms are important for teachers to be able to distinguish because they cannot fully integrate SEL and academic instruction without a deepened knowledge of these concepts, including how they overlap and differ from one another. Returning to the analogy of reading instruction, one could deliver a phonics lesson without solid knowledge of the underlying language processes; however, without the underlying knowledge, one could not easily adapt the lesson as needed and effectively scaffold for student understanding. According to Beck and McKeown (2002), in order to demonstrate real understanding of a concept you must be able to distinguish it from

other similar concepts. If teachers are not able to differentiate among similar SEL terms, it may be difficult for them to effectively integrate SEL instruction in their classrooms. This may be evident in the fact that such a large percentage of teachers incorrectly identified the definition of Social Studies as being a component of SEL. Since there are several terms in the definition that could be considered interchangeable with SEL (i.e., social, civic), teachers may not have had enough background knowledge of SEL to accurately identify it as not being a component of SEL.

Further explanation may be that many teachers feel it is “common sense” that if a child can sit still, listen carefully to directions, and/or persevere through difficult tasks they will be more successful in the classroom so it is easier for them to identify SEL within the context of classroom situations. However, in order for teachers to effectively integrate SEL into daily classroom instruction, explicit training in SEL terminology and theory may be beneficial during preservice coursework and staff development. This would give teachers a vocabulary and framework and help them see the explicit link between SEL and academic achievement, particularly how it may benefit struggling readers (McTigue, Washburn, & Liew, 2009; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007).

Teachers’ ability to identify the appropriate form of feedback regarding students’ academic efforts was promising. The vast majority (87%) of respondents were able to correctly identify the appropriate form of feedback. Recalling research in the area of teacher feedback by Mueller and Dweck (1998), praising students for their specific efforts rather than intelligence, can increase academic motivation by allowing students to take ownership of their learning through effort. The finding that teachers can



appropriately identify this type of response indicates they have some underlying understanding of how to execute feedback to students in a way that encourages effort and provides students with specific information regarding their performance. This is important because feedback that focuses on effort (e.g., “I like how you reread that sentence when it didn’t make sense”) often also highlights important SEL components, such as persistence, and encourages positive student-teacher relationships.

Overall knowledge of SEL did not significantly differ depending on the number of years teaching, certification type, and content area of teachers. Importantly, these findings indicate that knowledge of SEL is not improving (nor deteriorating) with additional years of experience. Thus, without professional development that targets SEL education, teachers are unlikely to learn or improve their knowledge about SEL from the time they entered the teaching profession. The findings may also indicate a need for additional instruction on SEL in both traditional and alternative certification programs.

Findings from the multiple regression performed on total knowledge scores by each of the teacher perception scales indicated that the measures of teachers’ perceptions were not predictive of their knowledge. Although no significant results were found using inferential statistical methods, the descriptive data clearly point to a gap in teachers’ knowledge regarding SEL. It appears from this data, that including SEL in teacher training programs and in teacher education courses may help increase knowledge of SEL and allow teachers to understand the link between SEL and students’ academic success.

## PERCEPTIONS OF SEL AND ITS ROLE IN THE CLASSROOM

Regarding teachers' perceptions of the role of SEL in the classroom, the results clearly demonstrated that teachers feel SEL is important and believe that it is highly linked to academic achievement - 100% of teachers agreed with the statement "SEL is important" and 95% agreed with the statement "academic achievement is highly linked to SEL". Additionally, teachers overwhelmingly (99%) agreed that SEL was as important as academic learning. This is an important finding because it indicates that teachers recognize, at least to some degree, that SEL plays a role in learning. These findings are similar to previous findings on teachers' perceptions of the importance of SEL in which 99% of teachers perceived SEL to be important and 96% perceived SEL to enhance academic outcomes (Buchanan et al., 2009).

Pertaining to who is responsible for teaching SEL, the results were less clear. Given the previously reported findings that teachers felt SEL was important for academic attainment, the results of **who** they felt should be most responsible for teaching SEL seemed mildly contradictory. Teachers agreed more (72%) with the statement that parents should be most responsible for teaching SEL than with the statement that teachers should be most responsible (40%). In essence, these findings indicate that teachers felt these SEL skills are critical for academic success, but should be learned at home. However, when asked if SEL belonged more in the home than in school, 81% of teachers disagreed. This result, seems to conflict with the previous results and indicates that teachers do feel SEL has some type of role in the classroom but may be unsure about **what** that role is.

These are important findings because they indicate a discrepancy between teachers' beliefs and practices. It seems natural that if teachers feel SEL is important to academic attainment, they would also feel it is their responsibility to teach it. However, the results do not indicate such a perception. These mixed responses as to where SEL instruction belongs, may be a result of having little formal training in SEL in their teacher preparation, yet through practice, teachers have concluded that SEL skills are critical in the classroom. If teachers are not well trained and able to articulate the role SEL plays in academic achievement, it is certainly more difficult for them to integrate it in a way that is meaningful and beneficial to students' long-term academic achievement (Elias, Zins, Graczyk, & Weissberg, 2003).

No differences were found on the perceptions scales by the number of years teaching, certification type, and content area. Thus, regardless of teachers' experience, what kind of certification they hold (i.e., traditional or alternative), or what subject matter they teach, no differences were observed in their perceptions of the importance of SEL, its implementation, or their preparedness for teaching SEL. Yet, these findings are important because they indicate that perceptions of SEL are similar across teachers' backgrounds.

Regarding teachers' perceptions of student-teacher relationships, the results overwhelmingly indicated that teachers perceived these relationships to be important to academic achievement. This finding is encouraging given that positive student-teacher relationships are vital in creating a risk-free learning environment (Cohen, 2006; McTigue, Washburn, & Liew, 2009). Relationships such as these promote a classroom

atmosphere where students are comfortable making mistakes, have greater motivation to learn, and persist in challenging situations. In turn, such an environment enhances academic success.

It is clear from the results that teachers have some understanding of the value of student-teacher relationships in academic achievement. However, it is not clear to what depth teachers understand these relationships. In other words, although nearly all of the teachers surveyed reported student-teacher relationships to be important to academic achievement, there is not enough information to reveal **how** teachers perceive these relationships to help. Replication of this research with the inclusion of teacher interviews for qualitative analysis would be beneficial in examining this phenomenon further.

Results from items regarding teachers' perceptions visibly indicate that teachers feel SEL plays an important role in the classroom whether it be in terms of SEL education or fostering positive student-teacher relationships. However, there does not seem to be a clear idea of who is responsible for teaching SEL. These results highlight a need to prepare teachers more in the area of SEL in regards to what it encompasses and how to successfully integrate it in their classrooms.

#### PERCEIVED AND ACTUAL KNOWLEDGE OF SEL AND PRESERVICE PREPARATION

If teachers are conflicted regarding the importance of SEL and how it should be implemented in the classroom, is it possible this is due to the fact they have not been adequately prepared for SEL? Presumably, if teachers felt well prepared to teach SEL,

their perceived knowledge of SEL would be high. The correlation between teachers' perceived and actual knowledge was non-significant indicating no connection between teachers perceived and actual knowledge of SEL. In other words, teachers who reported being more knowledgeable of SEL did not necessarily have higher or lower scores.

However, the finding that only 11% of teachers felt their knowledge of SEL had come mostly from preservice coursework was notable. It is also important to highlight that the largest percentage (37%) of teachers reported interactions with students as being the means to which they have obtained most of their knowledge of SEL. Furthermore, less than half (45%) of teachers agreed they had received instruction on SEL in at least one of their preservice classes. These findings taken in context with one another indicate teachers have learned much about SEL in the process of teaching but may not have been prepared for it prior to arriving in the classroom. These findings may indicate that teachers have practical knowledge of SEL, but not formal knowledge due to a lack of explicit instruction on SEL in their teacher preparation programs. Clearly there is a need to improve preservice instruction in SEL.

#### SCHOOL SUPPORT OF SEL

More than half (59%) of teachers surveyed indicated they implemented at least one type of SEL program at their school and less than half of those teachers felt their school provided adequate training for implementing such programs. This is noteworthy on two levels: 1) SEL instruction should ideally take place as an integrated form of instruction

rather than as a separate curriculum, and 2) if schools are going to implement an SEL program, proper training for teachers is essential.

SEL instruction is most effective when it is integrated with classroom instruction, especially reading instruction, rather than being implemented separately because much of students' developmental pathways (e.g., cognitive, social) are intertwined and should be addressed concurrently (Liew & McTigue, 2009). In schools, SEL programs are often either implemented improperly or not at all, due in part, to teachers viewing it as a task that takes away from instructional time (Ragozino, Resnick, O'Brien, & Weissberg, 2003; Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Small, & Jacobson, 2009). In particular, separate, discrete SEL programs are perceived as time constraints and as taking time away from accomplishing academic tasks. Therefore, proper teacher training in how to integrate SEL into regular classroom instruction may be beneficial. The dialogic reading strategy (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006) and Responsive Classroom (McTigue & Rimm-Kaufman, 2011) are both examples of how SEL can be integrated into everyday classroom learning. Since students actively use many SEL components while learning a new academic concept, teaching them how to capitalize on these components (e.g., emotional regulation during a challenging task) can be an enriching to instructional effectiveness.

In regards to schools that implement separate SEL curriculums, proper training may also be a concern. Teachers who are not properly trained in how to implement SEL will not have a firm grasp on the importance of doing so and, therefore, will be less likely to actually apply SEL to classroom instruction. According to Weissberg and

O'Brien (2004), in order for SEL programs to be successful, they must be well organized and properly implemented which would include effective planning, coaching, practice, and support for teachers.

Results of the present survey may indicate that teachers need more provision in these areas in order to effectively apply SEL instruction in their classrooms. Through proper training and support, teachers may be better able to see the significance of SEL to academic attainment, and therefore, may be more likely to embrace it as a component of everyday instruction and understand how to flexibly model and teach such skills within the context of academic instruction.

## CHAPTER IV

### STUDY 2:

#### PRESERVICE TEACHER KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTIONS OF SEL

##### PURPOSE

The purpose of the present study was to assess what preservice teachers knew about components of social emotional learning, and what their perceptions of SEL were in regards to implementation, importance, and preparedness for teaching SEL. This study was also interested in examining preservice teachers' perceptions of student-teacher relationships and their importance to academic achievement. The following questions were examined: (1) How familiar are preservice teachers with terminology and concepts regarding SEL? (2) What are preservice teachers' perceptions regarding SEL's importance to academic achievement? (3) What are preservice teachers' perceptions regarding their preparedness for teaching SEL? (4) What are preservice teachers' perceptions regarding implementation of SEL? (5) What are preservice teachers' perceptions regarding the importance of student-teacher relationships to academic achievement? (6) Are there differences by age and classification on preservice teachers' overall knowledge scores? (7) Are there differences by age and classification on preservice teachers' perceptions of SEL's importance, their preparedness to teach it, and SEL's implementation? (8) Do preservice teachers' perceptions of SEL's importance, their preparedness to teach it, and its implementation predict overall knowledge scores



on concepts of SEL? and (9) Is there a relationship between preservice teachers' perceived knowledge of SEL and their actual knowledge?

## METHODS

In the following subsections I discuss methodology related to the present study. I present information regarding participants, survey development, data collection, and analysis.

## PARTICIPANTS

The participants were 155 preservice teachers majoring in education at a public university in the southwest region of the United States. All students were enrolled in reading education courses. In order to determine knowledge of SEL prior to having had any practical experience in the classroom, students who had yet to complete any field-based teacher education (i.e., field-based methods or student teaching) were chosen to participate in the study. All of the preservice teachers surveyed were seeking a traditional undergraduate program certification in teaching.

Ninety-eight percent of participants were female; this is relatively high compared to state and national statistics in which 88% and 87% of inservice teachers are female respectively (Texas Education Agency, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). White students made up the majority of the sample at 88% with the remaining sample being 8% Hispanic, 2% black, and 2% other. This is comparable to overall statistics for inservice teachers in the state which were reported by TEA in 2009 as being 67% white, 22% Hispanic, 9% black, and 4% other. More than half (52%) of students

who completed the survey were classified as juniors, while the remaining were 23% seniors, 18% sophomores, and 6% freshmen.

Seventy-seven percent of students were seeking general certification in early childhood through sixth grade, while the remaining 23% were seeking general middle school certification. Nine percent of the sample was seeking additional certification in ESL or bilingual education and 5% were seeking additional certification in special education. Statistics for the state, as reported by TEA, indicate 70% of inservice teachers serve in regular education, 10% in special education, and 8% in ESL/bilingual, making this sample similar to state statistics regarding certification type. Students were asked to check all subjects they were interested in teaching. Sixty-six percent selected Reading/Language Arts, 53% selected Math, 41% selected Social Studies, and 37% selected Science.

## INSTRUMENTATION

In the following subsections I discuss development of the online survey used to collect data regarding preservice teachers' knowledge and perceptions of SEL. I also address the final structure of the survey and data collection procedures.

## SURVEY DEVELOPMENT

The survey was originally developed by the researcher based on questionnaires created by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) group (Elias et al., 1997). These questionnaires were designed as a guide for schools to reflect

on SEL practices in the classroom. Additionally, the format of the knowledge questions, regarding SEL terminology, were modeled after a survey by Joshi, Binks, Hougen, Dahlgren, Ocker-Dean, and Smith (2009) in which teacher knowledge of reading terminology was measured. Correct definitions for the SEL knowledge questions were created from descriptions of SEL terms from previously published work in the field (e.g., McTigue, Washburn, & Liew, 2009; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007) and from information provided on the CASEL website.

The survey development then proceeded through several stages. First, several educational researchers reviewed the survey. These professionals were knowledgeable in the field of social emotional learning and provided information on content and format. Next, a pilot study was conducted. Thirteen preservice teachers were recruited for participation in the study. Each student was asked to take the survey and provide qualitative feedback regarding the layout and wording of items. Feedback from all participants was used to update the survey in an effort to ensure all pertinent areas of SEL were covered and the knowledge questions were discriminatory. Changes were made in three areas. First, Questions were added to the perceptions and implementation scale to include information on student-teacher relationships. Second, answer options from two of the knowledge scale questions were modified for difficulty. Third, one of the definition questions on the knowledge scale was modified to be more uniform with other definitions. Analysis of inter-item reliability ( $\alpha = .44$ ) was also run during the pilot study and found to be low.

## INSTRUMENT

The final survey was comprised of 42 questions divided into two sections: (a) teacher knowledge of SEL and (b) teacher perceptions (i.e., opinions) of SEL.

The Teacher Knowledge portion of the survey measured preservice teachers' knowledge of social emotional learning terms as well as how they may be applied in the classroom. This portion of the survey consisted of 18 questions presented in three formats: Six questions required teachers to match SEL terms with corresponding definitions; seven questions required teachers to identify examples of SEL; and the remaining five provided classroom vignettes in which teachers must identify the response most appropriate for SEL development. One item was found to be troublesome in the reliability analysis and was removed from the survey.

The teacher perception portion of the survey measured preservice teachers' perceptions of the importance of SEL instruction; how prepared they felt to teach SEL; and how it may be implemented in the classroom. Twenty-four questions were included in the teacher perception section of the survey: eight questions pertained to teachers' perceptions of the importance of teaching SEL; six questions pertained to how prepared teachers felt to teach SEL; and six questions related to the implementation of SEL in the classroom. A factor analysis was performed to create three separate scales of teacher perceptions of SEL's importance, their preparedness for teaching SEL, and implementation of SEL. Remaining items pertaining to preservice teachers' perceptions of student-teacher relationships were examined descriptively.

## DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The online survey was administered early in the spring 2011 semester. A total of 719 students were emailed the instrument. Initial contact with the students was made through their course instructors. The professors agreed to share the survey with their students and emailed the link to the survey along with a brief description of its contents and purpose to all their students.

Depending on the date of distribution, students had between one and two weeks to complete the survey and a reminder email was sent 3 days prior to the deadline. In order to encourage participation, students were offered the option of entering their email address into a drawing for a \$100 gift card.

One hundred and ninety-seven students completed the survey, which generated an initial response rate of 27%. Forty-two of these surveys were found to be incomplete and deleted from the group leaving a sample size of 155 preservice teachers, yielding an adjusted response rate of 22%.

## DATA ANALYSIS

In this subsection I move from development of the survey and data collection to analysis of the data. I discuss reliability and factor analysis results as well as outcome measures for preservice teachers' knowledge and perceptions of SEL.

## RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

A Cronbach's alpha statistic was calculated to determine the inter-item reliability of the teacher knowledge portion of the survey and to remove unreliable items. One of the 18 items was deleted yielding a total of 17 questions for the analysis with a reliability coefficient of .56. According to Nunnally (1978), coefficients below .7 indicate low reliability. Previous research in this area has not reported a reliability coefficient making it difficult to obtain comparison data on reliability statistics regarding survey measures on this topic (Buchanan et al., 2009).

## FACTOR ANALYSIS OF PERCEPTION SCALES

Regarding the perceptions scale, a factor analysis using SPSS software was run in order to determine underlying factors and examine the survey's construct validity in measuring teacher perceptions of SEL. Items regarding teacher perceptions of the importance of SEL, teacher perceptions of their preparedness for teaching SEL, and perceptions of implementation of SEL were grouped a-priori and examined using factor analysis.

Analysis of eight items for the teacher perceptions of importance scale indicated two factors contributing to 67% of the variance. The first factor included six items pertaining to teachers' perceptions of the importance of SEL to academic achievement while two items in the second factor pertained to teachers' perceptions of SEL **not** being important to academic achievement. Factor loadings were .77 and .79 respectively (see Table 15).

**Table 15** Factor Loadings of Preservice Teacher Perceptions of Importance Scale

Item	Perceptions of SEL being Important to Achievement	Perceptions of SEL not being Important to Achievement
SEL is important.	.68	
SEL is as important as academic learning.	.77	
Academic achievement is highly linked to SEL.	.79	
SEL contributes to Reading Achievement.	.85	
Reading achievement is highly linked to SEL.	.75	
SEL contributes to overall academic achievement.	.76	
Reading achievement is <b>not</b> highly linked to SEL.		.81
Academic achievement is <b>not</b> highly linked to SEL.		.77
Variance	48.99	17.77
Eigenvalue	3.92	1.42

Analysis of six items pertaining to teacher perceptions of preparedness for teaching SEL indicated one factor accounting for 58% of the variance with a factor loading of .76 (see Table 16).

**Table 16** Factor Loadings of Teacher Perception of Preparedness Scale

Item	Perceptions of Preparedness
How knowledgeable do you feel regarding SEL?	.64
Where do you feel most of your knowledge of SEL came from?	.75
How many of your preservice classes have addressed SEL?	.83
I feel prepared on how to integrate SEL into reading instruction.	.81
I received instruction on SEL in at least one of my preservice classes.	.81
I have high confidence for teaching SEL.	.70
Variance	57.69
Eigenvalue	3.46

Finally, six items pertaining to teachers' perceptions of implementation of SEL were examined and indicated two factors accounting for 54% of the variance. Interpretation of factor loadings did not yield any meaningful constructs with five questions landing in the first factor and one in the second factor. Values of the factor loadings were .53 and .86 respectively (see Table 17). All remaining questions on the survey were examined descriptively.



**Table 17** Factor Loadings of Teacher Perceptions of Implementation Scale

Item	Perceptions of Implementation (A)	Perceptions of Implementation (B)
(A) Parents should be most responsible for teaching SEL.	.53	
(A) SEL should be taught as a separate curriculum.	.61	
(A) Teachers should be most responsible for teaching SEL.	.51	
(A) SEL belongs more in the home than in school.	.72	
(A) School counselors should be most responsible for teaching SEL.	.77	
(B) SEL should be integrated into daily instruction.		.86
Variance	33.65	20.71
Eigenvalue	2.01	1.24

## RELIABILITY OF PERCEPTION SCALES

Additionally, a Cronbach's alpha was obtained to examine internal consistency reliability on each of the three scales as well as an inter-scale correlation to determine discriminant validity. Reliability coefficients of .83, .55 and .57 were obtained for the perceptions of importance, preparedness, and implementation scales, respectively. The mean value of the three coefficients was .65 indicating moderately low reliability among the scales. Inter-scale correlations show one low correlation between sets of scales. Although this may indicate the instrument has low discriminant validity, and that each scale does not measure a separate aspect of SEL perceptions, some overlap may be

expected due to the nature of the topic. In other words, attributes of items pertaining to the implementation of SEL may intersect with items of preparedness such as whether preservice teachers feel teachers should be most responsible for teaching SEL and how much preparation they feel they've had to actually do so. Table 18 displays the alpha reliability coefficients and inter-scale correlations for all three scales.

**Table 18** Means, Standard Deviations, Alpha Reliability and Inter-scale Correlations of Teacher Perception Scales

Scale	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Alpha</u>	<u>Inter-scale correlation</u>		
				Importance	Preparedness	Implementation
Importance	1.70	.38	.83		.153	.099
Preparedness	2.53	.45	.55			.244*
Implementation	2.45	.35	.57			

## OUTCOME MEASURES

Descriptive statistics on teacher knowledge were examined. In order to ascertain how familiar preservice teachers are with SEL concepts, overall scores on the knowledge scale were obtained, along with frequency counts on individual items. Also, commonly missed questions were analyzed for patterns in incorrect responses that may suggest confusion of specific terms or elements of SEL among preservice teachers. Items with high rates of accurate responses were also examined to determine what concepts preservice teachers seemed to be most familiar with.

Descriptive statistics were also examined on items regarding preservice teachers' perceptions of student-teacher relationships in order to determine how preservice teachers felt these relationships affect academic achievement. Results were examined by determining the average rating of each item and examining frequency counts.

Descriptive and inferential statistics on preservice teacher perceptions of SEL were examined. Since the interest of the study was to gather information on students' perceptions of SEL and how/if they would implement it in the classroom, data were reported on the importance students placed on SEL and the extent that students felt SEL was linked to academic achievement. Additionally, data on how prepared preservice teachers felt to teach SEL and how they felt about its implementation in the classroom were examined. Perception items were based on a Likert-type-type scale. Results were examined by determining the average rating of each scale and examining frequency counts for individual items.

In order to examine whether certain factors may have an effect on preservice teacher knowledge scores and their overall responses to each of the perception scales, four two-way ANOVA tests were conducted. Differences in overall knowledge scores and responses to perception items were examined by students' age and classifications. Age was measured categorically with four options including (a) 18 - 20, (b) 21 - 22, (c) 23 - 25, and (d) 26+ years. This grouping of ages helped to separate traditional from non-traditional students. Classifications were categorized as freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior.

Multiple regression was used to examine associations between preservice teachers' knowledge scores and each of the perception scales. Because the study was interested in exploring the relationship between students' knowledge and perceptions of SEL, regression analysis was used to determine whether preservice teachers' total knowledge of SEL scores could be predicted by their responses on each of the perception scales.

In order to examine whether a relationship existed between preservice teachers' perceived knowledge of SEL and their actual knowledge, a Pearson's correlation coefficient was obtained between these items. A correlation was run between the responses of the item in which teachers were asked to rate their knowledge level regarding SEL (highly, moderately, and not knowledgeable at all) and teachers' overall scores on the knowledge scale of the survey. The Pearson's correlation was obtained using SPSS statistical software.

## RESULTS

In the following subsection I discuss findings from the preservice teacher survey. I discuss results from both the knowledge and perception portions of the survey.

### KNOWLEDGE OF SEL TERMS

Descriptive results indicate the average overall score on the SEL knowledge scale was 71% and ranged from 29% to 94%. As shown in Table 19, 69% of preservice teachers correctly identified the definition of SEL, 70% identified the correct definition of

**temperament**, and 79% correctly identified the definition of **self-esteem**. However, preservice teachers demonstrated more difficulty with identifying the correct definitions of less common terminology: Less than half (48%) of students correctly identified the definition of **effortful control**, 61% identified **self-efficacy**, and only 45% identified the correct definition of **self-regulation**. Further analysis revealed confusions between certain terminology, specifically, 34% of students incorrectly identified **effortful control** as being **self-regulation**.

**Table 19** Preservice Teacher Percent Correct Responses on SEL Terminology

Term	Definition	
Percent		
Correct		
Effortful Control	Your students' ability to inhibit a dominant response in favor of a less dominant response. For example, waiting their turn to speak instead of calling out.	48%
Self-efficacy	Your students' beliefs that they can effectively perform a specific task. For example, whether or not they believe they can successfully read a difficult book.	61%
Temperament	Your students' emotional, attentional, and behavioral style that remains relatively stable during life but can be shaped by their experiences. For example, the degree of patience they normally exhibit.	70%
Self-esteem	Your students' general perceptions of their overall abilities and attitudes toward themselves. For example, in academics, whether they believe they are smart or not.	79%
Self-regulation	Your students' own self-evaluations of a specific performance which then determines their subsequent behaviors. For example, successfully reading a book and then deciding to try one that is more difficult.	45%
Social Emotional Learning	Teaching components that encourage positive relationships in students and teach effective life strategies. For example, teaching students how to be responsible.	69%

## IDENTIFYING EXAMPLES OF SEL

Preservice teachers demonstrated skill at identifying specific examples of SEL. For this task, participants were given a list of activities and asked to correctly identify which ones were examples of SEL and which ones were not (see Table 20). On four of six questions, preservice teachers scored at 90% or higher. The remaining scores were respectable as 83% and 89% of preservice teachers correctly identified phonemic awareness and informal reading assessments (respectively) as not being components of SEL.

**Table 20** Preservice Teacher Percent Correct Identification of Examples and Non-examples of SEL

Examples	Percent correct responses	Non-examples	Percent correct responses
Fostering healthy relationships with others	94%	Instruction in phonemic awareness	83%
Teaching students to monitor their own behaviors	93%	Informal reading assessments	89%
Learning to reflect on thoughts and feelings	95%		

Further descriptive findings indicate preservice teachers struggled at identifying components of SEL in reading instruction. Collective scores of students were inconsistent when given scenarios about SEL and reading instruction and were asked to identify how SEL was incorporated in each setting. For example, preservice teachers were given a scenario in which a teacher was conducting small reading groups and must

redirect a student in a way that would encourage development both academically and in SEL. Collective percent correct scores for each of the questions in this section ranged from 53% to 82%. Students had the most difficulty recognizing statements that a teacher could make to encourage SEL and for identifying whether students were displaying good self-efficacy, self-esteem, or both.

As shown in Table 21, preservice teachers were asked to identify from several examples of teacher feedback, which one was best for encouraging SEL. According to Mueller (2007), the most appropriate praise for fostering academic motivation in students are statements that: (a) Focus on effort rather than intelligence to prevent students from believing their intelligence is a fixed trait that they have no control over, and (b) include specific feedback for the task at hand so that students will know exactly what they have done well so they can repeat it in the future. The majority (74%) responded correctly indicating preservice teachers were skilled at recognizing the best form of feedback to give students regarding their academic efforts.

**Table 21** Preservice Teachers Responses to Identifying Appropriate Teacher Feedback

Teacher Feedback	Percent Responded as Correct
"Great job reading!"	18%
"I really like how you used several strategies."	74%
"You are so smart!"	7%
"I like being your teacher."	1%

## INFLUENCE OF AGE AND CLASSIFICATION ON KNOWLEDGE SCORES

In order to examine differences by certain demographic variables such as age and classification on students' overall knowledge scores, an ANOVA was run using overall knowledge scores as the dependent variable. No significant differences were found on their overall knowledge scores depending on class ranking or for age,  $F_s(3, 141) = .72$  and  $1.29$ , *ns*. This may indicate that regardless of the number of years a student has been in school, they will not demonstrate an improved score on the knowledge portion of the survey. Further, regardless of students' ages or life experiences, they did not perform better or worse than other students. In addition, interaction effects between each of these groups were examined and no significant interactions were found,  $F(6, 141) = 1.41$ , *ns*.

## PREDICTION OF KNOWLEDGE SCORES BY RESPONSES ON PERCEPTION SCALES

Multiple regression was conducted to test whether the three perception scales predicted students' overall knowledge scores. Results reveal that the perceptions of importance and perceptions of implementation scales significantly predicted overall knowledge scores ( $R^2 = .21$ ,  $F(3, 148) = 12.87$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The multiple regression coefficient was  $.46$  and adjusted *R-Square* was  $.19$  indicating that about 19% of the variance in total knowledge scores can be attributed to students' perceptions of SEL. Additionally, it was found that responses on the perceptions of importance scale significantly predicted knowledge scores ( $\beta = -.17$ ,  $p < .05$ ) as did responses on the perceptions of



implementation scale ( $\beta = .43, p < .001$ ). Results of the multiple regression are displayed in Table 22.

**Table 22** Multiple Regression Results of Teacher Perception Scales on Total Knowledge of SEL Scores

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	$\beta$	<i>t</i>
Perception of Importance of SEL	-1.09	.48	-.17	-2.26*
Perception of Preparedness for Teaching SEL	.22	.41	.04	.55
Perception of Implementation of SEL	2.97	.52	.43	5.70***
Multiple Regression <i>R</i>	.46			
Adjusted <i>R Square</i>	.19			

\* $p < .05$

\*\*\* $p < .001$

#### PERCEPTIONS OF SEL

The remaining questions pertaining to perceptions of SEL were measured on a four-point Likert-type-type scale (1 = Strongly Agree, 2 = Agree, 3 = Disagree, 4 = Strongly Disagree) and divided into three scales: (a) Perceptions of implementation, (b) Perceptions of preparedness for teaching SEL, and (c) Perceptions of SEL's importance. Results for these three scales are reported using overall means from each scale and frequency counts for individual items.

## PERCEPTIONS OF IMPLEMENTATION

A mean score for preservice teachers' responses to items on the perceptions of implementation scale was obtained to determine students' overall beliefs regarding implementation of SEL (see Table 18). The average rating on this scale was 2.45 indicating preservice teachers' responses to items on the implementation scale were almost right in the middle. This may indicate preservice teachers don't have strong beliefs either way regarding implementation of SEL.

Descriptive results indicate that preservice teachers felt SEL should be a part of school instruction. In fact, 99% either agreed or strongly agreed that SEL should be integrated into daily classroom instruction. When asked who is **most** responsible for teaching SEL, 63% agreed or strongly agreed that it should be teachers. When questioned further, 60% agreed or strongly agreed that it should be parents and only 19% believed school counselors should be most responsible. Regarding whether teachers felt that SEL belonged more in the home than in school, 81% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. Results are reported in Table 23.

**Table 23** Preservice Teacher Beliefs of SEL's Implementation

Statement	Percent of Teacher Responses			
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
SEL should be integrated into daily instruction.	53%	46%	1%	0%
Teachers should be most responsible for teaching SEL.	9%	54%	34%	3%
Parents should be most responsible for teaching SEL.	12%	48%	38%	1%
School counselors should be most responsible for teaching SEL.	3%	16%	68%	13%
SEL belongs more in the home than in school.	3%	17%	72%	8%

#### INFLUENCE OF AGE AND CLASSIFICATION ON PERCEPTIONS OF IMPLEMENTATION

In order to examine the effects of preservice teachers' age and classification, a two-way ANOVA was run with responses to the perceptions of implementation scale as the dependent variable. No differences were found by classification on students' responses to items pertaining to implementation of SEL:  $F(3, 141) = 1.98, ns$ . This may indicate that regardless of the number of years students have been in school, they will not respond differently to items pertaining to implementation of SEL. There was also no

difference by age on students' responses to items pertaining to implementation,  $F(3, 141) = 1.14$ , *ns*, possibly indicating that regardless of students' ages or life experiences, they will not regard implementation of SEL differently. In addition, interaction effects between each of these groups were examined and no significant interactions were found  $F(6, 141) = 1.38$ , *ns*.

#### PERCEPTIONS OF PREPAREDNESS

A mean score for preservice teachers' responses to items on the perceptions of preparedness scale was obtained to determine students' overall beliefs regarding implantation of SEL (see Table 18). The average rating on this scale was 2.53 indicating preservice teachers, again, were right in the middle and may not have strong beliefs either way regarding their preparedness for teaching SEL.

Regarding preservice teachers' preparation for SEL, descriptive results indicate that only 33% of preservice teachers surveyed felt they are prepared to integrate SEL into classroom reading instruction and less than half (40%) either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I have high confidence for teaching SEL". Further analysis indicates the majority (64%) disagreed or strongly disagreed that they had already received instruction on SEL in at least one class of their preservice coursework (see Table 24).

**Table 24** Preservice Teacher Perceptions of Preparation for Teaching SEL

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I feel prepared on how to integrate SEL into my reading instruction.	5%	28%	54%	12%
I have high confidence for teaching SEL.	6%	34%	49%	11%
I received instruction on SEL in at least one of my preservice classes.	5%	30%	48%	16%

Preservice teachers were asked to indicate how knowledgeable they felt about SEL (very knowledgeable, moderately knowledgeable, not knowledgeable). Notably, none of the preservice teachers ranked themselves as “very knowledgeable”. In fact, the majority (65%) categorized themselves as “not knowledgeable”. Furthermore, the majority of preservice teachers (63%) reported not having had any classes that addressed SEL (see Table 25).

**Table 25** Preservice Teachers' Reportings of Number of Courses Taken that Addressed SEL

Statement	0	1 - 2	3 or more
Which of the following most accurately represents the number of classes you have taken that have addressed issues of SEL?	63%	33%	3%

Regarding where preservice teachers gained their knowledge of SEL, the largest percentage (59%) indicated they did not recall any instruction on the topic thus far. Only 25% reported preservice coursework as their main source of information on SEL and another 12% reported interactions and discussions with other preservice teachers as being their predominant source of information on SEL (see Table 26).

**Table 26** Teachers' Perceptions of Where They Obtained Knowledge of SEL

	Preservice Coursework	Interactions with Other Preservice Teachers	Other	Do not recall any instruction
Where do you believe most of your knowledge of SEL came from?	25%	12%	3%	59%

## INFLUENCE OF AGE AND CLASSIFICATION ON PERCEPTIONS OF PREPAREDNESS

In order to examine the effects of preservice teachers' age and classification, a two-way ANOVA was run with responses to the perceptions of preparedness for teaching SEL scale as the dependent variable. No differences were found by classification on preservice teachers' responses to items pertaining to preparedness for teaching SEL  $F(3, 140) = 2.55, ns$ . This may indicate that regardless of the number of years a student has been in school, they will not feel differently regarding their preparation for teaching SEL. No differences were found by age on preservice teachers' responses to items pertaining to preparedness,  $F(3, 140) = .29, ns$ , possibly indicating that regardless of students' ages or life experiences, they will not regard feelings of preparedness for teaching SEL differently. In addition, interaction effects between each of these groups were examined and no significant results were found  $F(6, 140) = .69, ns$ .

## PERCEPTIONS OF IMPORTANCE

A mean score for preservice teachers' responses to items on the perceptions of importance scale was obtained to determine students' overall beliefs regarding the importance of SEL (see Table 18). The average rating on this scale was 1.70 indicating preservice teachers tended to, overall, agree more with statements regarding the importance of SEL.

Descriptive results of preservice teachers' perceptions of the importance of SEL indicate they feel it is important in academic achievement. All teachers reported that

they felt SEL is important and 96% agreed or strongly agreed that it was as important as academic learning. Additionally, 96% agreed or strongly agreed that academic achievement is highly linked to SEL and 93% also felt it was highly linked to reading achievement. Finally, 95% of teachers reported that they agreed or strongly agreed that SEL contributes to overall academic achievement. These results are outlined in Table 27.

**Table 27** Preservice Teacher Perceptions of SEL's Importance

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
SEL is important.	56%	44%	0%	0%
SEL is as important as academic learning.	39%	57%	3%	0%
Academic achievement is highly linked to SEL.	41%	55%	3%	0%
Reading achievement is highly linked to SEL.	27%	65%	7%	1%
SEL contributes to overall academic achievement.	34%	61%	4%	1%
SEL contributes to Reading Achievement SEL.	33%	65%	2%	0%
Academic achievement is not highly linked to SEL.	1%	7%	63%	29%



**Table 27** Cont.

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Reading Achievement is not highly linked to SEL.	3%	7%	70%	20%

## INFLUENCE OF AGE AND CLASSIFICATION ON PERCEPTIONS OF IMPORTANCE

To examine the effects of preservice teachers' age and classification on their perceptions of the importance of teaching SEL, a two-way ANOVA was run with responses to the perceptions importance scale as the dependent variable. No differences were found by classification on preservice teachers' responses to items pertaining to the importance of SEL,  $F(3, 137) = 1.24, ns$ . In other words, regardless of the number of years students have been in school, they will not feel differently regarding how important it is to teach SEL. No differences were found by age on preservice teachers' responses to items pertaining to importance,  $F(3, 137) = 1.35, ns$ , possibly indicating that regardless of students' ages or life experiences, they will not feel differently in regards to the importance of teaching SEL. In addition, interaction effects between each of these groups were examined and no significant interactions were found  $F(6, 137) = .81, ns$ .

## PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIPS

Preservice teachers' perceptions of the importance of student-teacher relationships and their affect on academic achievement were also examined. The results overwhelmingly

indicated that preservice teachers felt strong student-teacher relationships could have a positive effect on academic outcomes. Nearly all preservice teachers agreed with all three statements regarding relationships including, “Positive student-teacher relationships are important for enhancing students’ academic success”, “A student’s sense of support from the teacher can have an impact on their academic success”, and “Creating a classroom where students feel a sense of belonging can foster academic success” (see Table 28). These results indicate that preservice teachers have a strong understanding of the importance of the socio-emotional aspect of teaching, at least in regards to the relationships fostered between students and teachers.

**Table 28** Preservice Teacher Perceptions of Student-Teacher Relationships

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Positive student-teacher relationships are important for enhancing students' academic success.	68%	32%	0%	0%
A student's sense of support from the teacher can have an impact on their academic success.	65%	34%	1%	0%
Creating a classroom where students feel a sense of belonging can foster academic success.	75%	25%	0%	0%

## RELATIONSHIP OF PERCEIVED AND ACTUAL KNOWLEDGE

Finally, to examine the link between preservice teacher knowledge and confidence in their knowledge, a Pearson's correlation test was conducted between teachers' perceived knowledge of SEL and their actual score on the knowledge scale. The majority of students (65%) reported being "not knowledgeable" of SEL while the remaining 35% reported being moderately knowledgeable. As reported earlier, preservice teachers performed on average at 71% on the knowledge scale. Results indicated a significant negative correlation between the two variables,  $r(153) = -.18, p < .05$  meaning that the lower students perceived their knowledge of SEL to be, the higher their actual scores.

## DISCUSSION

The present study provides evidence that many preservice teachers recognize the importance of SEL, but are less sure of how they would implement it in their own classrooms. It also provides evidence that, to date, there may be a lack of preservice preparation in regards to teaching SEL. Of particular concern is preservice teachers' inability to identify some fundamental SEL terms. Many preservice teachers are also unable to correctly identify SEL components in the context of classroom scenarios but are able to recognize specific examples and non-examples of SEL. These results, taken together, indicate there is an underlying confusion among preservice teachers thus far in their undergraduate coursework about SEL in regards to both terminology and how it would look in everyday classroom instruction.

## KNOWLEDGE OF SEL

Is it really necessary for teachers to have knowledge of definitions regarding SEL in order for them to effectively implement SEL? According to Bloom's taxonomy, the recognition of a concept's definition is considered to be a very basic level of understanding (Bloom, 1956). In order to recognize how specific elements of SEL are related to academic attainment, a fundamental understanding of SEL terminology is required before a teacher can successfully implement it in the classroom. Although preservice teachers were skilled at recognizing specific examples of SEL, correctly identifying SEL definitions and recognizing SEL in the context of reading instruction were difficult for preservice teachers. This may indicate a developing knowledge of SEL and how it looks in the classroom but that preservice teachers are still lacking knowledge in both the fundamental terminology and SEL's practical application, particularly in reading instruction, at least prior to gaining any field experience during their coursework. The poor results in knowledge of terminology, including confusion of similar terms, mixed with high scores on recognition of specific SEL examples, may reflect a limited depth of knowledge thus far during preservice teachers' coursework. As demonstrated by preservice teachers' confusion of several closely tied terms (e.g., self-efficacy/self-esteem & self-regulation/effortful control) they do not yet seem to possess the appropriate depth of knowledge to make accurate distinctions between these concepts. Making an analogy to literacy instruction, this is similar to teachers recognizing that a phonics lesson can help students make letter-sound connections, but would not be able to aptly discern between the related concepts of phonemic awareness,

phonological awareness and phonics. Accordingly, preservice teachers may understand that having good self-efficacy and self-esteem are beneficial to students in a learning environment but they may not understand the more nuanced aspects, such that self-efficacy is typically task-specific (i.e., a student's belief about whether or not they can read a specific text) and self-esteem refers to students' general disposition (i.e., whether students believe they are smart).

These terms are important for teachers in training to be able to distinguish prior to gaining any field experience, because they cannot fully integrate SEL and academic instruction without a deepened knowledge of these concepts, including how they overlap and differ from one another. Returning to the analogy of reading instruction, one could deliver a phonics lesson without solid knowledge of the underlying language processes; however, without the underlying knowledge, one could not easily adapt the lesson as needed and effectively scaffold for student understanding. According to Beck and McKeown (2002), in order to demonstrate real understanding of a concept you must be able to distinguish it from other similar concepts. If prospective teachers are not able to differentiate among similar SEL terms, it may be difficult for them to effectively integrate SEL instruction in their future classrooms. Explicit training in SEL terminology and theory may be beneficial during preservice coursework and future staff development. This would give teachers a vocabulary and framework to help them see the explicit link between SEL and both short and long-term academic achievement, and particularly how it may benefit struggling readers (McTigue, Washburn, & Liew, 2009; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007).

While several areas of SEL knowledge were lacking for preservice teachers, their ability to identify the appropriate form of feedback regarding students' academic efforts was promising. Almost three-quarters of the respondents were able to correctly identify the appropriate form of feedback. Recalling research in the area of teacher feedback by Mueller and Dweck (1998), praising students for their specific efforts rather than intelligence, can increase academic motivation by allowing students to take ownership of their learning through effort. The finding that preservice teachers can appropriately identify this type of response is promising and indicates they have some underlying understanding of how to execute feedback to students in a way that encourages effort and provides students with specific information regarding their performance. This is important because feedback that focuses on effort (e.g., "I like how you reread that sentence when it didn't make sense") often also highlights important SEL components such as persistence and encourages positive student-teacher relationships.

ANOVA results on the total knowledge scores by age and classification yielded no significant results. This indicates that age, specifically whether a preservice teacher is a traditional or non-traditional student, and classification (i.e., how many years they have been in school), has no effect on overall knowledge of SEL. While no significant results were found, these findings are still important because they indicate knowledge of SEL is not improving with additional coursework, at least prior to entering field-based courses. This could mean more effort needs to be made in preservice education programs to emphasize SEL and increase preservice teachers' knowledge.

Findings from the multiple regression performed on total knowledge scores by each of the teacher perception scales drew two significant findings: (a) Total knowledge scores could be predicted by responses on the perceptions of importance scale and (b) Total knowledge scores could be predicted by responses on the perceptions of implementation scale. These findings are important because they suggest preservice teachers' responses to items of perception are good predictors of their overall knowledge scores. Interestingly, results indicated that for every point of increase on the perceptions of importance scale, there was a one-point decrease on knowledge scores. Additionally, for every one-point increase on the perceptions of implementation scale there was nearly a three-point increase in knowledge scores. Additionally, 19% of the variance in total knowledge scores could be attributed to responses on all three of the perception scales. All of these results taken together indicate a connection between how students perceive SEL and what they actually know about SEL. This is important when considering how to develop preservice instruction regarding SEL. Again, these findings indicate students have some background information regarding SEL but seem to be lacking in knowledge of specific terminology.

#### PERCEPTIONS OF SEL AND ITS ROLE IN THE CLASSROOM

Regarding preservice teachers' perceptions of the role of SEL in the classroom, the results clearly demonstrate that teachers feel SEL is important and believe that it is highly linked to academic achievement -100% of teachers agreed with the statement "SEL is important" and 96% agreed with the statement "academic achievement is highly

linked to SEL”. Additionally, preservice teachers overwhelmingly (96%) agreed that SEL was as important as academic learning. This is an important finding because it indicates that preservice teachers recognize, at least to some degree, that SEL plays a role in learning. These findings are similar to previous findings on teachers’ perceptions of the importance of SEL in which 99% of teachers perceived SEL to be important and 96% perceived SEL to enhance academic outcomes (Buchanan et al., 2009).

Pertaining to who is responsible for teaching SEL, the results were less clear. Given the previously reported findings that preservice teachers felt SEL was important for academic attainment, the results of **who** they felt should be most responsible for teaching SEL were difficult to interpret. Sixty-three percent of preservice teachers agreed with the statement “Teachers should be most responsible for teaching SEL”. However, when questioned further, 60% also agreed with the statement “Parents should be most responsible for teaching SEL”. In essence, these findings indicate that preservice teachers felt these SEL skills are critical for academic success, but were unclear about **where** they should be taught (and by whom). However, if SEL is so important to academic attainment, then it is logical that it would be an important aspect of classroom instruction. On the other hand, when asked if SEL belonged more in the home than in school, 80% of preservice teachers disagreed. This result, seems to conflict with the previous results and indicates that preservice teachers do feel SEL has some type of role in the classroom but may be unsure about **what** that role is.

These are important findings because they indicate an uncertainty between preservice teachers’ beliefs about the importance of SEL and their perceived practices of



SEL. While the majority of preservice teachers agreed that teachers should be most responsible for teaching SEL, the majority also agreed parents should be most responsible. It is possible that preservice teachers believe SEL is important in both the home and school setting, but are unsure about where it is **most** important. One can certainly propose that SEL is important in both environments: (a) Parents are students' "first teachers" and should play an active role in teaching their children the importance of self-regulation and other SEL skills and (b) SEL is equally important in the school environment because it plays a crucial role in academic attainment. However, given the fact that these respondents are a group of future teachers, it seems logical that they would place more emphasis on the teacher's role in developing SEL since it is important to academic success, however this was not the case. While it is important for parents to play an active role in their children's learning processes, preservice teachers need to be aware that not all parents do so. Furthermore, it is imperative that teachers in training learn to be aware of and prepared to teach students with diverse home backgrounds, recognizing when modifications to instruction (SEL or academic) are needed.

Age and class differences were not found on the perception scales. This indicates that age, specifically whether a preservice teacher is a traditional or non-traditional student, and class ranking (i.e., how many years they have been in school), has no effect on preservice teachers' perceptions of the importance of SEL, its implementation, or preparedness for teaching SEL. These findings are still important, because they indicate that perceptions of SEL are similar across age and class ranking.

Regarding preservice teachers' perceptions of student-teacher relationships, the results overwhelmingly indicated that students perceived these relationships to be important to academic achievement. This finding is encouraging given that positive student-teacher relationships are vital in creating a risk-free learning environment (Cohen, 2006; McTigue, Washburn, & Liew, 2009). Relationships such as these promote a classroom atmosphere where students are comfortable making mistakes, have greater motivation to learn, and persist in challenging situations. In turn, such an environment enhances academic success.

It is clear from the results that preservice teachers have some understanding of the value of student-teacher relationships in academic achievement. However, it is not clear to what depth preservice teachers understand these relationships. In other words, although nearly all of the preservice teachers surveyed reported student-teacher relationships to be important to academic achievement, there is not enough information to reveal **how** preservice teachers perceive these relationships to help. Replication of this research with the inclusion of teacher interviews for qualitative analysis would be beneficial in examining this phenomenon further.

#### PERCEIVED AND ACTUAL KNOWLEDGE OF SEL AND PRESERVICE PREPARATION

If preservice teachers are conflicted regarding the importance of SEL and how it should be implemented in the classroom, is it possible this is due to the fact they have not been adequately prepared for SEL? Presumably, if preservice teachers felt well prepared to

teach SEL, their perceived knowledge of SEL would be high. A significant negative correlation was found between preservice teachers' perceived and actual knowledge of SEL (in other words, the more knowledgeable preservice teachers reported being on SEL, the lower their actual scores were). This was a noteworthy finding because it indicated preservice teachers, at least those who had yet to take any field-based courses, were not able to predict how much they knew regarding SEL. Conversely, the lower preservice teachers ranked their knowledge of SEL, the higher their actual scores were. Given that 65% of preservice teachers rated their perceived level of knowledge regarding SEL as "low" and the remaining 35% as "moderate", it is likely that these results indicate preservice teachers actually know more about SEL than they perceive. This is promising in that it shows preservice teachers have a foundation of knowledge regarding SEL and may indicate they have received some information regarding SEL in their coursework. However, it is not clear how well developed preservice teachers' knowledge will be by the time they enter the teaching profession.

Only 25% of preservice teachers felt their knowledge of SEL had come mostly from preservice coursework and, of the remaining respondents, 59% reported not having any recollection of SEL instruction at all in their coursework. Furthermore, only 35% of preservice teachers agreed that they had received instruction in SEL in at least one of their preservice classes. These findings may indicate preservice teachers have learned very little about SEL in their undergraduate education classes prior to entering field-based courses. Additionally, when taken into context with previous results regarding preservice teachers displaying some underlying knowledge of SEL, these findings may

indicate that preservice teachers have practical knowledge of SEL, but may not have formal knowledge due to lack of explicit instruction in their teacher preparation programs to date.

### SCHOOL SUPPORT OF SEL

Many schools today utilize SEL programs, which means incoming preservice teachers need to be aware of these programs and how they are implemented. Although SEL instruction should ideally take place as an integrated form of instruction rather than as a separate curriculum, if schools are going to implement an SEL program, proper training for teachers is essential. This is important because proper training in the importance of SEL to academic attainment during preservice coursework provides the background knowledge incoming teachers need in order to have a smooth transition when implementing SEL in the classroom.

SEL instruction is most effective when it is integrated with classroom instruction, especially reading instruction, rather than being implemented separately because much of students' developmental pathways (e.g., cognitive, social) are intertwined and should be addressed concurrently. (Liew & McTigue, 2009). In schools, SEL programs are often either implemented improperly or not at all, due in part, to teachers viewing it as a task that takes away from instructional time (Ragozino, Resnick, O'Brien, & Weissberg, 2003; Ransford, Greenberg, Domitrovich, Small, & Jacobson, 2009). In particular, separate, discrete SEL programs are perceived as time constraints and as taking time away from accomplishing academic tasks. Therefore, proper preservice teacher training

in how to integrate SEL into regular classroom instruction may be beneficial in allowing teachers to understand SEL's benefits. The dialogic reading strategy (Doyle & Bramwell, 2006) and Responsive Classroom (McTigue & Rimm-Kaufman, 2011) are both examples of how SEL can be integrated into everyday classroom learning. Since students actively use many SEL components while learning a new academic concept, teaching them how to capitalize on these components (e.g., emotional regulation during a challenging task) can be an enriching to instructional effectiveness.

In regards to schools that implement separate SEL curriculums, proper training may also be a concern. Teachers who are not properly trained in how to implement SEL will not have a firm grasp on the importance of doing so and, therefore, will be less likely to actually apply SEL to classroom instruction whether through daily integration or as a separate program. According to Weissberg and O'Brien (2004), in order for SEL programs to be successful, they must be well organized and properly implemented which would include effective planning, coaching, practice, and support for teachers once they are in the classroom.

Results of the present survey may indicate that preservice teachers need more provision in the area of SEL in order to have background knowledge of its importance and effectively apply SEL instruction in their classrooms. Through proper preservice training and inservice support, teachers may be better able to see the significance of SEL to academic attainment, and therefore, may be more likely to embrace it as a component of everyday instruction and understand how to flexibly model and teach such skills within the context of academic instruction.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS

Social emotional learning is an important component to successful academic attainment (Duncan et al., 2007; McClelland et al., 2007; Liew et al., 2008). For Elementary students, possessing certain skills, such as listening to instructions or persevering when a task becomes difficult, can mean the difference between academic success and failure. It can be especially critical for developing readers who encounter many challenges as they learn to decode numerous words and decipher meaning from text (McTigue et al., 2009). Therefore, teacher knowledge of social emotional learning skills is critical in order for teachers to instill in their students the expertise needed to persist through rigorous academic tasks.

#### SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Findings from both studies revealed many similarities in preservice and inservice teachers' knowledge and perceptions of SEL. First, both groups struggled to identify the correct definitions of SEL terms. Furthermore, confusion between similar terms (i.e., self-efficacy/self-esteem) was evident in both groups. These findings indicate a need for instruction of fundamental SEL terms, preferably in teacher preparation programs.

Preservice and inservice teachers both overwhelmingly agreed on two points: (a) SEL is important to academic success and (b) student-teacher relationships are important for fostering academic success. These findings are important because they reveal that,

regardless of where teachers are in their career (i.e., currently teaching or still in training), they seem to recognize the importance of SEL in some underlying manner, whether it is in relation to teaching SEL or the importance of student-teacher relationships. However, the results previously reported on teachers' perceptions of implementation of SEL indicate confusion for both groups regarding who is responsible for teaching SEL. This supports the idea that, while teachers agree SEL is important, they do not agree on who should teach it. Furthermore, they may be unclear about how to effectively integrate it into classroom instruction.

Responses from both preservice and inservice teachers on items regarding preparedness for teaching SEL indicate there may not be enough being done at the preservice level to train teachers in issues regarding SEL. Only 11% of inservice and 25% of preservice teachers reported their preservice coursework as being where they received most of their information regarding SEL. Furthermore, less than half (45%) of inservice teachers and 35% of preservice teachers reported having at least one preservice class that addressed SEL.

Several differences also existed in responses from preservice and inservice teachers. First, inservice teachers were better able to recognize instruction that incorporated SEL in the context of classroom scenarios than preservice teachers. This may be due to the fact that inservice teachers have had some experience in the classroom and are better able to apply their experiences to recognizing SEL in practice. It may also be that preservice teachers did not have enough experience with SEL, whether it be through university preparation or real life experience, to recognize SEL in context.

While both groups agreed that SEL was important to academic achievement, preservice teachers were more likely to agree that teachers should be most responsible for teaching SEL. In fact, 63% of preservice teachers agreed with this statement while only 40% of inservice teachers agreed. This difference is interesting and may indicate that teachers in training are more likely to view areas of SEL as being a part of their responsibility as educators. Future research exploring the discrepancy of responses between preservice and inservice teachers regarding the responsibility of teaching SEL may provide further insight to this topic.

Finally, previous results indicated both preservice and inservice teachers did not feel most of their knowledge on SEL came from preservice instruction. However, while most responses from preservice teachers (59%) on this same question indicated they had not recalled any information whatsoever on SEL, the largest number of inservice teachers (37%) indicated most of their knowledge had come from everyday interactions with students. This is a notable finding, not only in that it indicates there may not be enough instruction on SEL in preservice coursework, but also that most of what teachers know regarding SEL they seem to have learned from practical experience. This strengthens the argument that, while teachers have an underlying foundation of SEL they may be lacking in the formal instruction that would allow them to see the direct benefits of SEL to academic achievement. If this is indeed the case, teachers would greatly benefit from deepening their knowledge on SEL by learning the terminology and how SEL directly impacts learning prior to gaining practical experience in the field.



## IMPLICATIONS

In the following subsections, I discuss the implications of this research and previous research on elementary instruction and for teacher preparation.

## INSTRUCTION

The need for teachers to be well versed in SEL is particularly important for teachers of at-risk students (e.g., low SES, minority). It is meaningful to note that while this study focused on teacher knowledge of SEL, this work overlaps with broader research on teacher-disposition. The values and attitudes teachers bring to their work, which is beyond pedagogical knowledge, can impact learning outcomes (Hill-Jackson & Lewis, 2010). Specifically, a teacher's disposition, which is defined as "the values, commitments and professional ethics that influence behaviors towards students, families, colleagues, and communities and affect student learning, motivation and development as well as the educator's own professional growth" (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2002, p.53), will impact how a teacher approaches classroom instruction. Teachers with dispositions conducive to teaching at-risk students will be more likely to seek instructional methods that are in the best interest of their students and embrace both the academic and social aspects of instruction. These teachers understand that their job is not just imparting knowledge on their students but also teaching the socio-emotional skills of learning (Hill-Jackson & Lewis, 2010).

The positive impact of SEL on academic attainment in prior reviews of the research is evident (Diekstra, 2008; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, &

Schellinger, 2011; Payton et al., 2008). Students who participated in SEL programs in their classrooms repeatedly showed gains in academic performance with lasting positive effects shown in follow-up studies (Durlak et al.; 2011; Payton et al., 2008).

Additionally, previous research has indicated that these effects were not limited to students who were identified as having behavioral or emotional concerns rather, positive effects could be found in all students who participated in SEL programs (Diekstra, 2008, Durlak et al. 2011).

In regards to reading instruction, it cannot be denied that basic language components such as phonemic and phonological awareness are crucial aspects to any reading program. However, it is imperative that reading teachers be prepared for aspects of instruction beyond the basics of language. If students do not have the behavioral traits associated with SEL to execute reading skills, learning may be delayed or difficult. Classroom teachers need to understand that SEL is just as important, if not more important, to classroom instruction as the content (Niemi & Poskiparta, 2002).

Additionally, the concept of academic resilience, where academic and life success may be achieved in spite of environmental hardships (Wang, Haertel, & Walberg, 1994), is heavily interwoven with SEL. For educators teaching in high-risk areas, SEL is especially crucial given that students in these areas have more obstacles to overcome in order to achieve academic success. SEL integrated with daily classroom instruction can model positive behaviors for high-risk students to help them overcome adversity. These positive behaviors may include setting personal goals, fostering healthy relationships, and persisting in the face of challenges.

Additionally, positive student-teacher relationships can promote academic resilience in high-risk students by helping them foster healthy relationships and providing students with positive role models. A teacher's efforts to create a positive learning atmosphere and maintain strong relationships with students can have lasting effects on students' academic achievement. Teachers need to be aware that these efforts are worthwhile and can even overcome pre-determined behavioral attributes of students (Liew, Chen, & Hughes, 2010; Valiente et al., 2008) as a means to increasing academic success.

Given that positive effects of SEL have been repeatedly demonstrated in prior research, the implications for instruction are strong. It is imperative that schools consider the social and emotional components of learning along with the cognitive. Unfortunately, a focus on high-stakes testing has shifted instruction to focus primarily on academic content, while overlooking the interwoven nature of the cognitive, social, and emotional aspects of learning.

#### TEACHER PREPARATION

Teachers may need instruction on SEL before they enter the classroom. Given the demonstrated importance of SEL to learning, teachers should have experience with SEL and be aware of it prior to their first year of teaching. As the results from the present survey indicate, teachers seem to become more cognizant of SEL's importance after they have entered the classroom. Only 11% of teachers cite preservice coursework as being their primary means of knowledge regarding SEL while 59% of preservice teachers do

not recall any instruction whatsoever. This finding indicates that more preparation is needed for teachers regarding implementing SEL in their classrooms.

Effective preservice instruction on SEL would demonstrate how SEL impacts academic achievement **and** how it is effectively executed in the classroom. Instruction in specific research-based SEL programs and strategies would be beneficial. For example, the Responsive Classroom (RC) approach can be one model for introducing preservice teachers to these concepts. It is important to note that RC is a method (not a program), which attempts to promote social, emotional, and academic growth by emphasizing all three components in the classroom (McTigue & Rimm-Kaufman, 2011). The RC approach views the educational process as dependent on the relationships formed both inside and outside of the classroom and recognizes that the social and academic aspects of learning are interconnected. Comparisons of schools utilizing RC with matched schools not using RC, demonstrated larger academic gains for students in an RC classroom (Rimm-Kaufman & Chiu, 2007; Rimm-Kaufmann, Fan, Chiu, & You, 2007). With its emphasis on student-teacher relationships, the RC approach can affect change in the classroom by altering the way teachers view the role of the relationship between teachers and students and how this relationship affects academic achievement.

Additionally, the Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) program, where separate lessons regarding SEL are taught approximately once a week, has been identified in the research as an effective, well-designed program that teaches students to identify and manage their emotions, with limited interruptions from other instructional time. Additionally, PATHS teaches students how to apply socio-emotional skills to

academic concepts such as study skills, setting goals, and practicing good work habits (Weissberg & O'Brien, 2004). Instruction on programs such as PATHS can give preservice teachers an idea of how SEL can be incorporated in the classroom as a regular part of instruction.

It is imperative that teachers obtain an understanding of how behaviors and attitudes specific to SEL (i.e., being able to sit still or persevere through difficult tasks) affect academic achievement over the long-term before they ever enter a classroom. Mischel's **marshmallow test** of the late 1960's has become a classic example of how children's ability to self-regulate may impact their future academic achievement. In this experiment, preschoolers were offered the choice of eating one marshmallow right away or, if they could wait 15 minutes, they would receive two marshmallows. A follow-up study conducted 20 years later indicated students that were able to delay gratification in the original study, not only had higher SAT scores, but were also generally more successful than their non-delaying peers (Mischel, Shoda, & Rodriguez, 1989). Mischel's findings emphasize the importance that should be placed on developing life-long learning skills in SEL (e.g., persistence). Perhaps if teachers were given a strong foundation of SEL concepts to effectively execute them with academic instruction, the result would be improved long-term academic gains. Making instruction of SEL an explicit component of teacher preparation and inservice programs may help teachers deepen their understanding of SEL concepts in general as well as SEL's long-term impacts on academic achievement.

## LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Several limitations exist in the present study. First, due to limited resources, the sampling technique was one of convenience and may not be representative of all inservice and preservice teachers in the United States. Due to this limitation, results should be carefully interpreted and only within the context of the sample represented. Future research could be conducted to widen the scope of the study and obtain a more representative national sample.

Additionally, the reliability coefficients of each of the survey's scales were low indicating low internal consistency. As a result, teachers' responses to the survey should be interpreted with some caution. Further developments on the survey may improve reliability coefficients and, therefore, improve reliability of the survey's results.

It is also important to note the possibility of bias in participants' responses. Given they were taking a survey regarding SEL, they may have been more inclined to report feeling SEL was important. However, the anonymous online format of the survey may have helped minimize some of this effect.

The results of both studies were limited to objective responses from teachers which created a limited view of inservice and preservice teachers' knowledge and perceptions of SEL. Due to the complexity of the topic, gathering qualitative feedback from teachers regarding SEL through other formats (e.g., interviews, focus groups, observations) may be beneficial in further determining what teachers know about SEL and how they perceive the topic. Furthermore, interviews and/or observations may help further examine the discrepancies indicated in the present study between teachers' beliefs of

SEL (i.e., its importance) and their beliefs regarding its implementation (i.e., who is responsible for teaching it). Expanding the research methods to include such qualitative feedback may help determine whether teachers' beliefs match their actual practices.

Additionally, further research into the best methods for teaching SEL, specifically in preservice coursework, may be beneficial. Research currently exists regarding the best methods for teaching SEL in classrooms (Payton et al., 2008; Weissberg & O'Brien, 2004), however research is limited in regards to how to prepare preservice teachers to integrate SEL in their classrooms. The results of the present study indicate there may be a need to incorporate more SEL instruction into preservice coursework. Research that clearly outlines the best ways to do so would be beneficial to instructors of undergraduate education students and may provide the depth of knowledge required for preservice teachers to successfully integrate SEL into their future classrooms.

Finally, additional research concentrated on SEL's effects on early reading achievement would be beneficial in examining its direct impact on early literacy development. Previous research has indicated links between SEL and reading and other academic outcomes (Blair & Razza, 2007; Liew et al., 2008, McClelland et al., 2007). However, in-depth analysis of SEL's effects on reading achievement in early learners would be beneficial in determining **what** components of SEL are helpful and **how** they aid in early reading development.

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